

BINDURA UNIVERSITY OF SCIENCE EDUCATION
FACULTY OF SOCIAL SCIENCES AND HUMANITIES
DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL WORK



**ALTERNATIVES TO IMPROVE SEXUAL ABUSE REPORTING POST USAID
TERMINATION IN GOKWE SOUTH, A CASE OF WARD 30**

BY

REBECCA LUTHO (B223802B)

**A RESEARCH PROPOSAL SUBMITTED TO BINDURA UNIVERSITY OF SCIENCE
EDUCATION IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENT OF THE
BACHELOR OF SCIENCE HONOURS DEGREE IN SOCIAL WORK**

SUPERVISOR: MISS GAMBIZA

SUBMITTED: JUNE 2026

DECLARATION

I **B223802B** hereby declare that this dissertation is my original work and has not been previously submitted for a degree or other qualification at any other institution. All sources and materials used have been duly acknowledged and referenced.

SIGNATURE:.....DATE.....

CLEARANCE FORM

BINDURA UNIVERSITY OF SCIENCE EDUCATION
FACULTY OF SOCIAL SCIENCES AND HUMANITIES
DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL WORK



.....
Retha

Student's signature

.....
11/06/2026

Date

.....
Aa

Supervisor's signature

.....
11/06/2026

Date

.....

Chairperson's signature

.....

Date

RELEASE FORM

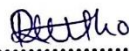
RELEASE FORM

STUDENT NUMBER: B223802B

**PROJECT TITLE: ALTERNATIVES TO IMPROVE SEXUAL ABUSE REPORTING
POST USAID TERMINATION IN GOKWE SOUTH, A CASE OF WARD 30**

YEAR GRANTED: 2026

Permission is hereby granted to the Bindura University Library to produce single copies of this project and lend or sell such copies for private, scholarly or scientific research purpose only. The author reserves other publication rights and neither the project nor extension extracts from it may be printed or otherwise reproduced without the author's written permission.

..........11/ /06/2026

Student 's Signature

Date

..........11/ /06/2026

Supervisor 's Signature

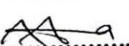
Date

APPROVAL FORM

APPROVAL FORM

I certify that I have supervised **Rebecca Lutho B223802B** for this research titled: **Alternatives to improve sexual abuse reporting post USAID termination in Gokwe South, Ward 30**, in partial fulfilment of the requirement for the Bachelor of Social Work Honours Degree at Bindura University of Science Education.

Supervisor's Name: **MISS T.A GAMBIZA**

Signature.....  Date..... 11/06/2026

Chairperson of Department Board of Examiners

The Departmental Board of Examiners is satisfied that this dissertation report meets the examination requirements of the Bachelor of Science Honors Degree in Social Work and I therefore recommend to the Bindura University to accept a research project by **Rebecca Lutho**, titled, **Alternatives to improve sexual abuse reporting in post USAID funding termination in Gokwe South District, Ward 30**, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Bachelor of Science Honors Degree in Social Work.

Chairperson's Name **MS E.E CHIGONDO**

Signature..... Date.....

AKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to Almighty God for His guidance, strength, and protection throughout my academic journey. I am deeply grateful to my supervisor, Miss Gambiza, for her invaluable guidance, patience, and support during the completion of this dissertation. My appreciation also goes to the Department of Social Work and the Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities at Bindura University of Science Education for the knowledge and academic support provided throughout my studies. Special thanks are extended to all participants and stakeholders who contributed valuable information to this research. Finally, I would like to thank my family, friends, classmates, and everyone who supported, encouraged, and believed in me throughout my academic journey. Their unwavering support made this achievement possible.

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to the survivors of sexual abuse, those who found the strength to speak their truth, and to those who were silenced before they could. To every woman, man, and children whose voice was suppressed whose report was dismissed, disbelieved, or never heard at all, whose pain was buried beneath stigma, fear and silence, you were never invisible. May this research be one small act of commitment that your stories matter, motivation to seek justice. Every silenced voice deserves to be heard, and that healing though hard is both possible and deserved.

ABSTRACT

Sexual abuse remains a significant social problem in Zimbabwe, with many cases going unreported due to stigma, fear, cultural barriers, and limited access to reporting mechanisms. The termination of USAID funding in 2025 further weakened protection and reporting systems, particularly in rural communities like Ward 30 in Gokwe South District. This study explored alternatives to improve sexual abuse reporting in the post-USAID era by identifying existing reporting mechanisms, assessing their effectiveness, and examining sustainable community-based and low-cost alternatives. Guided by Empowerment Theory, the study found that while structures such as the Department of Social Development, Victim Friendly Units, Community-Based Child Protection Committees, traditional and religious leaders, and mobile phone-based reporting mechanisms continue to exist, their effectiveness is constrained by resource shortages and accessibility challenges. The study concludes that strengthening community participation, local leadership, and existing grassroots structures can enhance sexual abuse reporting and promote sustainable survivor protection in the absence of external donor support.

LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

ACRONYM	FULL FORM
ACRWC	African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child
ACERWC	African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child
AU	African Union
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women
CEMSAR	Community Empowerment Model for Sexual Abuse Reporting
CPC	Community-Based Child Protection Committee
CRC	Convention on the Rights of the Child
DSD	Department of Social Development
GBV	Gender-Based Violence
IFSW	International Federation of Social Workers
NASW	National Association of Social Workers
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
POTRAZ	Postal and Telecommunications Regulatory Authority of Zimbabwe
PSEA	Prevention of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse
SADC	Southern African Development Community
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
SMS	Short Message Service

ACRONYM	FULL FORM
UNCRC	United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child
UNICEF	United Nations Children’s Fund
UNODC	United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
USSD	Unstructured Supplementary Service Data
VFS	Victim Friendly System
VFU	Victim Friendly Unit
WHO	World Health Organization

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Contents

DECLARATION.....	ii
CLEARANCE FORM	iii
RELEASE FORM.....	iv
APPROVAL FORM.....	v
AKNOWLEDGEMENTS	vi
DEDICATION	vii
ABSTRACT.....	viii
LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS.....	ix
TABLE OF CONTENTS	xi
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY	1
1.0 INTRODUCTION	1
1.1 BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY	1
1.2 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM.....	4
1.3 AIM OF THE STUDY	4
1.4 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES	5
1.5 RESEARCH QUESTIONS	5
1.6 ASSUMPTIONS OF THE STUDY	5
1.7 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY.....	6
1.7.1 TO POLICY MAKERS	6
1.7.2 TO SOCIAL WELFARE AGENCIES	6
1.7.3 TO LOCAL COMMUNITIES	7
1.7.4 GLOBAL SIGNIFICANCE.....	7
1.8 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY	7
1.8.1 UNDER-REPORTING	7
1.8.2 STIGMA AND FEAR.....	8

1.8.3 RESOURCE CONSTRAINTS	8
1.8. 4 GENERALIZABILITY	8
1.9 DELIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY	8
1.9.1 GEOGRAPHIC SCOPE	8
1.9.2 TIME FRAME	9
1.9.3 FOCUS.....	9
1.10 DEFINITION OF KEY TERMS	9
1.10.1 SOCIAL WORK	9
1.10.2 SEXUAL ABUSE	9
1.10.3 USAID FUNDING TERMINATION	10
1.11 CHAPTER OUTLINE	10
1.12 CHAPTER SUMMARY	11
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW	12
2.0. INTRODUCTION	12
2.1 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK	12
2.1.2 RELEVENCE OF THEORY TO THE STUDY	14
2.2 CONCEPTUALISATION OF KEY PHENOMENA IN THE STUDY	16
2.2.1 SEXUAL ABUSE	16
2.2.2 SEXUAL ABUSE REPORTING.....	17
2.2.3 USAID FUNDING WITHDRAWAL AND SERVICE DELIVERY	18
2.2.4 ALTERNATIVES TO ENHANCE SEXUAL ABUSE REPORTING.....	19
2.3 GENERAL OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY	20
2.3.1 GLOBAL OVERVIEW	20
2.3.2 REGIONAL OVERVIEW	21
2.3.3 LOCAL OVERVIEW	23
2.4 SEXUAL ABUSE REPORTING MECHANISMS AFTER THE END OF USAID FUNDING.....	25

2.4.1 FORMAL GOVERNMENT INSTITUTIONS.....	25
2.4.2 COMMUNITY BASED CHILD PROTECTION COMMITTEES (CPCS).....	29
2.4.3 RELIGIOUS AND TRADITIONAL AUTHORITY STRUCTURES AS INFORMAL REPORTING CHANNELS	31
2.4.4 CELL PHONE AND SMS-BASED REPORTING.	32
2.5 EFFECTIVENESS OF SEXUAL ABUSE REPORTING MECHANISMS IN WARD 30, GOKWE SOUTH	34
2.5.1 FORMAL GOVERNMENT INSTITUTIONS.....	34
2.5.2 COMMUNITY BASED CHILD PROTECTION COMMITTEES	36
2.5.3 RELIGIOUS AND TRADITIONAL AUTHORITY CHANNELS.....	38
2.6 ALTERNATIVES TO ENHANCE SEXUAL ABUSE REPORTING POST USAID FUNDING.....	41
2.6.1 CAPACITY BUILDING AND TRAINING OF TRADITIONAL AND RELIGIOUS LEADERS.....	41
2.6.2 STRENGTHENING AND RESOURCING OF COMMUNITY-BASED CHILD PROTECTION COMMITTEES.....	43
2.6.3 COMMUNITY-BASED AWARENESS CAMPAIGNS UTILISING INDIGENOUS COMMUNICATION STRUCTURES.....	44
2.6.4 TECHNOLOGY-FACILITATED REPORTING TOOLS ADAPTED FOR RURAL CONTEXT.....	46
2.6.5 ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT AS A FOUNDATION FOR REPORTING	47
2.7 RESEARCH GAPS	48
2.7.1 POST-USAID FUNDING KNOWLEDGE GAP	48
2.7.2. RESEARCH GAP FOR RURAL COMMUNITY	48
2.7.3 COMMUNITY-BASED ALTERNATIVES GAP	49
2.7.4 TECHNOLOGY-FACILITATED REPORTING GAP	49
2.8 STATUTORY INSTRUMENTS.....	49
2.8.1 UN CONVENTION ON THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD (CRC), 1989.....	49

2.8.2 AFRICAN CHARTER ON THE RIGHTS AND WELFARE OF THE CHILD (ACRWC), 1990	50
2.8.3 MAPUTO PROTOCOL, 2003.....	50
2.8.4 SADC PROTOCOL ON GENDER AND DEVELOPMENT, 2008	50
2.4.5 CONSTITUTION OF ZIMBABWE AMENDMENT (NO. 20) ACT 2013	50
2.8.5 CRIMINAL LAW (CODIFICATION AND REFORM) ACT [CHAPTER 9:23]..	51
2.8.6 DOMESTIC VIOLENCE ACT [CHAPTER 5:16]	51
2.9 CHAPTER SUMMARY	51
CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY	52
3.0 INTRODUCTION	52
3.1 RESEARCH APPROACH.....	52
3.2 RESEARCH DESIGN	52
3.3 STUDY POPULATION.....	53
3.4 SAMPLING	53
3.4.1 SAMPLE SIZE	54
3.4.2 SAMPLING TECHNIQUES	54
3.4.3 PURPOSIVE SAMPLING	54
3.5 RESEARCH PROCEDURE.....	54
3.6 DATA COLLECTION METHODS	55
3.6.1 IN-DEPTH INTERVIEWS	55
3.6.2 FOCUS GROUPS.....	56
3.7 DATA COLLECTION TOOLS.....	56
3.8 DATA PRESENTATION	57
3.9 DATA ANALYSIS	57
3.9.1 FAMILIARISATION	57
3.9.2 CODING.....	57
3.9.3 GENERATING THEMES	58

3.9.5 REPORT WRITING	58
3.10 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY	58
3.10.1 STIGMA AND FEAR.....	58
3.10.2 SELF-REPORTING.....	58
3.11 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY	59
3.11.1 GEOGRAPHIC SCOPE	59
3.11.2 TIME FRAME	59
3.11.3 FOCUS.....	59
3.12 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS	59
3.12.1 VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION.....	60
3.12.2 INFORMED CONSENT	60
3.12.3 CONFIDENTIALITY AND ANONYMITY	60
3.12.4 AVOIDANCE OF HARM	61
3.12.5 APPROVAL	61
3.13 CHAPTER SUMMARY	61
CHAPTER 4: DATA PRESENTATION, INTERPRETATION, ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS	62
4.0 INTRODUCTION	62
4.1 DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION OF PARTICIPANTS	62
4.1.1 DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION OF TOTAL PARTICIPANTS.....	63
TABLE 4.1.1: TOTAL PARTICIPANTS	63
4.1.2 GENDER AND AGE DISTRIBUTION OF SURVIVORS OF SEXUAL ABUSE	64
TABLE 4.1.2: GENDER AND AGE DISTRIBUTION OF SURVIVORS OF SEXUAL ABUSE.	64
4.2 DATA CODING AND ANALYSIS FRAMEWORK	64
4.3 SEXUAL ABUSE REPORTING MECHANISMS IN WARD 30, GOKWE SOUTH, POST-USAID TERMINATION	65

4.3.1 FORMAL GOVERNMENT INSTITUTIONS.....	65
4.3.1.1 DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT	65
4.3.2 COMMUNITY BASED CHILD PROTECTION COMMITTEES (CPCS).....	69
4.3.3 RELIGIOUS AND TRADITIONAL AUTHORITY STRUCTURES AS INFORMAL REPORTING CHANNELS	70
4.3.4 CELL PHONE AND SMS-BASED REPORTING	72
4.4 EFFECTIVENESS OF SEXUAL ABUSE REPORTING MECHANISMS IN WARD 30, GOKWE SOUTH	74
4.4.1 FORMAL GOVERNMENT INSTITUTIONS.....	74
4.4.2 COMMUNITY-BASED CHILD PROTECTION COMMITTEE (CPC).	77
4.4.3 RELIGIOUS AND TRADITIONAL AUTHORITY STRUCTURES.....	79
4.4.4 CELL PHONE AND SMS BASED REPORTING.....	80
4.5 COMMUNITY-BASED, LOW-COST ALTERNATIVES TO IMPROVE SEXUAL ABUSE REPORTING IN WARD 30, GOKWE SOUTH	83
4.5.1 CAPACITY BUILDING AND TRAINING OF TRADITIONAL AND RELIGIOUS LEADERS.....	83
4.5.2 STRENGTHENING AND RESOURCING OF COMMUNITY BASED CHILD PROTECTION COMMITTEES.....	85
4.5.3 COMMUNITY AWARENESS CAMPAIGNS WITH INDIGENOUS COMMUNICATION SYSTEMS	86
4.5.4 TECHNOLOGY-FACILITATED REPORTING TOOLS ADAPTED FOR RURAL CONTEXTS.....	87
4.5.5 ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT AS A BASE FOR REPORTING	89
4.6 DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS	90
4.6.1 EMPOWERMENT THEORY	90
4.6.2 SEXUAL ABUSE REPORTING MECHANISMS POST USAID TERMINATION	91
4.6.3 EFFECTIVENESS OF SEXUAL ABUSE REPORTING MECHANISMS POST USAID FUNDING	91

4.6.4 ALTERNATIVES TO IMPROVE SEXUAL ABUSE REPORTING MECHANISMS POST USAID FUNDING.....	92
4.7 CHAPTER SUMMARY	93
CHAPTER 5: SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS.....	95
5.0 INTRODUCTION	95
5.1 SUMMARY OF THE FINDINGS	95
5.1.1 SEXUAL ABUSE REPORTING MECHANISMS POST-USAID TERMINATION	95
5.1.2 EFFECTIVENESS OF SEXUAL ABUSE REPORTING MECHANISMS POST- USAID TERMINATION	95
5.1.3 COMMUNITY-BASED, LOW-COST ALTERNATIVES	96
5.2 CONCLUSIONS.....	97
5.3 RECOMMENDATIONS	97
5.3.1 GOVERNMENT OF ZIMBABWE.....	97
5.3.2 DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT	98
5.3.3 TRADITIONAL AND RELIGIOUS LEADERS	98
5.3.4 COMMUNITY BASED CHILD PROTECTION COMMITTEES (CPCS).....	98
5.3.5 NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANISATIONS.....	99
5.3.6 BINDURA UNIVERSITY OF SCIENCE EDUCATION	99
5.4 COMMUNITY EMPOWERMENT MODEL FOR SEXUAL ABUSE REPORTING (CEMSAR)	99
5.5 IMPLICATIONS FOR SOCIAL WORK PRACTICE	100
5.6 AREAS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH	101
REFERENCES:	102
LIST OF APPENDIXES.....	107
APPENDIX 1	107
APPENDIX 2.....	109
APPENDIX 3.....	110

APPROVAL LETTER	113
-----------------------	-----

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Globally, sexual abuse is a public health and human rights issue affecting millions of people worldwide and is especially challenging in Zimbabwe where sexual abuse is deeply entrenched in culture, there is widespread stigmatization, and access to good reporting systems is limited to the extent that there is chronic underreporting of sexual abuse cases (Masiyiwa, 2020). Sexual abuse can have devastating effects, not only on the victims physically, but also on their psychological health, social lives and can perpetuate cycles of violence in communities, especially vulnerable populations in rural areas where there is limited protective services. In the face of these challenges, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) has been pivotal in bolstering Zimbabwe's protection system through the investment of robust protection-related initiatives in 2024 alone totaling more than \$360 million in health, governance, and social protection programming (USAID Zimbabwe, 2024). However, the sudden withdrawal of funding by USAID in 2025 has resulted in a crucial gap in Zimbabwe's protection landscape, risking the gains made over the years and leaving rural communities such as Ward 30 in Gokwe South District without access to vital protections, thus emphasizing the importance of identifying and implementing sustainable, community-led alternatives to safeguard survivors' right to safety and justice.

1.1 BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Sexual abuse is a deep-rooted problem that impacts millions of people worldwide, regardless of demographic group and particularly among children. The World Health Organization (WHO) (2022) estimates that sexual violence happens to 1 in 3 women globally, and many of them face sexual violence for the first time in childhood. The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF, 2024), offers even more shocking figures, stating that more than 370 million girls

and women worldwide have been raped or sexually assaulted in their childhood years, or about one in every eight girls worldwide. Meta-analysis and systematic reviews have been valuable in shedding light on the prevalence of child sexual abuse worldwide. In an extensive meta-analysis, Stoltenborgh (2011) found that about 18% of girls and 8% of boys in the world are sexually abused before they turn 18. A more recent study by Barth (2013) estimates that as many as 31 percent of girls and 17 percent of boys might become victims of sexual abuse before they turn 18. The figures are likely to be understated because sexual abuse is known to be under-reported worldwide. A major problem that spans across all cultures and geographical regions is the phenomenon of underreporting of sexual abuse. Finkelhor (2015), estimates that only 30-40% of child sexual abuse cases are ever disclosed, depending on different factors, such as the relationship between the victim and the perpetrator, cultural context and the availability of supportive services. There are similar issues with adult sexual abuse; according to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC, 2019) less than 40% of women who have been victims of intimate partner violence seek help in any way and only 10% of those who do report abuse report it to police.

Sexual violence is prevalent in Sub-Saharan Africa and the region faces a disproportionate burden of sexual violence, due to unique cultural, economic and structural factors that impact prevalence and barriers to reporting and response. According to the African Child Policy Forum (2021), sexual violence against children in Africa is marked by its extreme levels of severity and often takes place in the family and community setting where disclosure is discouraged or punished. According to UNICEF (2023), over 79 million girls and women in Sub-Saharan Africa (17% of the global population) have experienced sexual violence as children. The prevalence is quite different across countries, with some countries reporting as high as 40% of girls and 25% of boys experiencing sexual abuse before the age of 18 (African

Union Commission, 2022). The regional studies have invariably highlighted various interrelated factors that account for the high prevalence and low reporting rates in Sub-Saharan Africa. Devries (2018) undertook an in-depth study of 14 African countries and found poverty, gender inequality, poor governance systems and cultural attitudes that protect the honor of the family over the protection of the individual to be key risk factors. The study also underscored the role of conflict, displacement, and economic instability in fostering an environment for sexual violence and an underdeveloped or unavailable formal protection system.

Zimbabwe's experience of sexual abuse mirrors the regional experience but is exacerbated by the country's longstanding economic context, and it has led to heightened vulnerabilities and reduced protection mechanisms. The prevalence is high, with the 2019 Violence Against Children Survey (VACS) revealing that 33.7 percent of females and 9.9 percent of males have suffered from sexual violence before they reached the age of 18, with close to one in 10 girls being sexually abused before age 10, particularly in rural areas where access to services is limited. Severe underreporting persists. Disclosure rate as low as 9% was found by Masiyiwa (2020), and Chibango (2022) reported that 69% of women experienced abuse in Ruwa, but only 2% disclosed, mainly due to economic dependence, cultural taboos and mistrust of authorities. Intrafamilial abuse is least prosecuted and yet rural studies indicate that it is 78%. Child labour, early marriage and temporary child relocation further increase vulnerability due to poverty. USAID-supported initiatives had improved the framework for protection in Zimbabwe through training more than 5,000 health workers, implementing referral systems in 45 districts, and providing assistance to 24-hour hotlines, as well as developing national policies and protection-focused specialized courts. But the sudden end of the USAID programmes in 2025 posed a significant problem with 67% of rural facilities suspending specialised services, 34 drop in centres were closed, and rural districts such as Gokwe South lost support and legal help. Community organisations were greatly impacted, with 78%

indicating that they halved their staffing or suspended operations, resulting in a significant lack of support and prevention for survivors.

1.2 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

There is underreporting of sexual abuse in Zimbabwe, which is attributed to a number of factors including stigma and fear of retribution, lack of trust in authorities and poor reporting mechanisms as a result of limited resources. The termination of USAID funding in 2025 exacerbates these issues, leaving gaps in the systems meant to protect vulnerable population like children and women, leaving Zimbabwe's protection systems weakened. Less funding has also led to fewer access to the sexual abuse reporting mechanisms, slow response to sexual abuse cases, and vulnerability among affected populations especially in Ward 30 Gokwe South District where sexual abuse cases have been on the rise. Although national policies and frameworks exist to address abuse, their implementation has faced challenges in some instances, which may be attributed to inconsistencies in funding and lack of capacity at local level (Chikodzi, 2023). As USAID funding to support survivors dwindles, there must be alternative approaches to ensure that survivors are able to report abuse safely, and that the response is timely, effective, and supportive.

1.3 AIM OF THE STUDY

The aim of this study is to explore alternatives to improve sexual abuse reporting post USAID termination in Gokwe South in Ward 30.

1.4 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

To identify sexual abuse reporting mechanisms in Ward 30 post USAID termination.

2. To assess the effectiveness of sexual abuse reporting mechanisms, post USAID termination.
3. To explore community-based, low-cost alternatives that can enhance sexual abuse reporting mechanisms in the absence of external funding.

1.5 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. What are the sexual abuse reporting mechanisms in this community in the absence of donor funding ?
2. How effective are the mechanisms currently being used?
3. Which community-based and low-cost alternatives that can improve and ensure sustainable reporting mechanisms in the absence of external funding.

1.6 ASSUMPTIONS OF THE STUDY

The study assumes that even with the ending of USAID support, sexual abuse cases in Ward 30 are still being underreported and existing community structures are still not sufficiently developed to have the capacity, resources, and confidence to function as their own reporting mechanisms. It also assumes that community members hold valuable knowledge which can be used to shape alternative reporting processes and strategies, and that key stakeholders (traditional leaders, health workers and local NGOs) are willing to engage in strengthening these processes. The study also assumes that cultural norms and stigma may still be affecting disclosure, and that community-driven, context specific solutions need to be explored. Further,

it assumes that respondents will be forthcoming and reliable with their information and that there are alternative reporting mechanisms that can be feasible in the socio economic setting of Gokwe South.

1.7 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The findings of this study are important for policy makers, social welfare organisations and the communities of Zimbabwe and the world in general, especially as funding for protection programmes has been reduced over the last few years. The research identifies, community-based and low-cost alternatives to these methods of reporting which can contribute to the development of sustainable protection systems that are not unduly dependent on international aid. This will contribute to keeping the public's right to safety, to justice and to protection intact, despite fluctuations in donor support.

1.7.1 TO POLICY MAKERS

The study provides evidence-based lessons learned on cost-effective models which can be integrated into national protection frameworks. These findings will help develop policies that are resilient to maintaining functionality even during lower levels of foreign assistance, as well as increase institutional accountability and public trust.

1.7.2 TO SOCIAL WELFARE AGENCIES

The research identifies the opportunities to improve operational resilience through implementation of community-based reporting mechanisms. It offers advice on capacity development, including training teachers, health workers, traditional leaders and local volunteers to serve as ready first points of contact for survivors. The results also highlight the

importance of improving partnership and cooperation between government and community actors to facilitate timely and prompt reporting and follow up.

1.7.3 TO LOCAL COMMUNITIES

The study advocates for community ownership of protection systems, which means that the residents themselves are active in the identification, reporting and prevention of sexual abuse. These types of community-driven approaches can help to decrease stigma, make reporting more accessible, and help to create a sense of community responsibility for the protection of survivors.

1.7.4 GLOBAL SIGNIFICANCE

The study also adds to the world's body of knowledge regarding how communities can maintain critical protection services with local resources. The research can be used as a reference for other countries in the same dilemma under the limited resources. The findings offer a concrete framework for developing sustainable, locally embedded reporting and protection mechanisms and lessons for governments, NGOs and community groups looking for solutions to sexual abuse reporting for long-term public protection (Chirwa & Banda, 2021).

1.8 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

1.8.1 UNDER-REPORTING

Due to the sensitive nature of sexual abuse there is significant underreporting, limiting their research to reported cases which may not reflect the actual prevalence of sexual abuse in the area. Furthermore, a lack of institutional supports and records has resulted from the closing of USAID programs, and there is a scarcity of secondary data on trends of sexual abuse reporting.

1.8.2 STIGMA AND FEAR

Fundamental cultural views, stigmatisation and a genuine fear of negative consequences or social isolation may also explain why survivors do not report their experiences, creating a significant sample selection bias in the data collected since only the boldest survivors will speak up. Furthermore, the study mainly uses self-reported data from survivors, community members and local authorities, which could be subject to recall bias and social desirability bias.

1.8.3 RESOURCE CONSTRAINTS

Limited time and financial resources may limit that scope of data collection and analysis, and leave out other vulnerable groups, such as children and people with disabilities, who may face different obstacles to sexual abuse reporting.

1.8.4 GENERALIZABILITY

Being a case study that is solely focused on the socio-economic and cultural context of Ward 30 - Gokwe South, the results are only limited to the specific context and will not be generalised to the entire district, other rural settings or other contexts globally. Therefore, the findings might not necessarily be fully representative of other wards or districts that have different socio-cultural contexts.

1.9 DELIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

1.9.1 GEOGRAPHIC SCOPE

The study only covers Ward 30 in Gokwe South district and not other wards or districts. To ensure focus and depth, wards outside Gokwe South are not covered by the study.

1.9.2 TIME FRAME

Research is specific to the time after the end of USAID funding and collection of data is limited to this time. This delimitation makes it possible to focus the research on gaining a better understanding of the local effects of the decreased external support and to pinpoint context-specific alternatives for better reporting.

1.9.3 FOCUS

This research focuses on reporting systems, as opposed to greater issues of sexual abuse and prevention, thus enabling a more discrete analysis of barriers and potential intervention in the local reporting system.

1.10 DEFINITION OF KEY TERMS

1.10.1 SOCIAL WORK

IFSW (2024) states that Social work is a profession found around the world that works toward social change, development and human rights using evidence-based practice and advocacy. social work is a practice-based profession which aims to enhance human well-being and help meet the basic human needs of all people, with particular attention to the needs and empowerment of people who are vulnerable, oppressed and living in poverty, (NASW, 2017) is another description of social work offered by Dominelli (2023).

1.10.2 SEXUAL ABUSE

WHO (2023) defines Sexual abuse as any sexual act, attempted sexual act or sexual contact by violence or coercion, or unwanted sexual advances, sexual touching or sexual comments or gestures towards a person's sexuality, regardless of the nature of the relationship or setting. UNICEF (2021), also defines sexual abuse as, any deliberate, unwanted, and non-essential act

of a sexual nature, either completed or attempted, that is perpetrated against a person (including for exploitative purposes) and that results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury, pain, or psychological suffering.

1.10.3 USAID FUNDING TERMINATION

Mutasa (2022) reported that financial and technical assistance to Zimbabwean child protection programmes from the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) has either been suspended or reduced. Lynn (2025) characterizes the curtailment of USAID funding, especially in Africa, as a devastating setback of food aid and HIV prevention, which puts the lives of the vulnerable at stake.

1.11 CHAPTER OUTLINE

Below is a proposed order and outline of the chapters.

Chapter One: Introduction and Background

This chapter introduces and sets the background of the research. It includes the problem statement, justification of the study, objectives guiding the research, research questions, significance, limitations, and delimitations.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

A survey of relevant literature related to reporting systems for sexual abuse, community based protection systems, and post-donor withdrawal issues, with an emphasis on rural areas, like Ward 30.

Chapter Three: research design and methodology

This chapter describes the research methodology, sampling techniques, data collection methods and data analysis techniques that have been adopted in the study.

Chapter Four: Data Presentation, Analysis and Discussion of Findings

This chapter provides presentation, analysis and discussion of the research findings in light of the research objectives and literature.

Chapter Five: Conclusions and Recommendations

Findings are summarized and conclusions and recommendations are given for policy makers, community leaders, nongovernmental organizations and future researchers.

1.12 CHAPTER SUMMARY

Chapter One introduced the study by outlining the context of sexual abuse reporting in Ward 30 after the termination of USAID support. It presented the background of the problem, highlighted the continued underreporting of cases, and explained why exploring new community-based reporting alternatives is necessary. The chapter also stated the purpose, objectives, research questions, significance, scope, limitations, and delimitations of the study. Overall, it established the foundation and rationale for the study by presenting the key issues, rationale, and direction of the research.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0. INTRODUCTION

This chapter focuses on theoretical framework, Empowerment Theory and its relevance to the study. The chapter further reviews literature relevant to the study focusing on global, regional and local overview, effect of the termination of USAID funding to sexual abuse reporting. Then it further explores reporting mechanisms after termination of funding and their effectiveness as well as alternatives to improve them through exploring community-based, low-cost alternatives. This will be achieved through the use of three main objectives guiding the study which are: to identify sexual abuse reporting mechanisms in Ward 30 post USAID termination; to assess the effectiveness of the reporting mechanisms; and to explore community-based, low-cost alternatives that can enhance sexual abuse reporting in the absence of external funding.

2.1 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Empowerment Theory, which originated from community psychology and was extensively developed by Zimmerman (1995), who defined empowerment as a process through which individuals, organizations, and communities gain greater control over decisions and actions affecting their lives. The theory provides a useful framework for addressing sexual abuse reporting in resource-constrained settings by emphasizing the ability of individuals and communities to gain control, make informed decisions, and influence systems that affect their safety. This is particularly relevant to the current study because of the fragility of reporting systems in Zimbabwe after the end of donor funding, where alternative reporting systems that focus on local capacity building are needed. This is directly linked to the objective of empowerment theory, which empowers survivors, builds local institutions and engages communities, all essential elements of a sustainable, self-reliant reporting system. The theory also helps drive the study to consider mechanisms to improve reporting that can be sustained

through community structures, cultural strengths and low-cost interventions that increase the ownership of the reporting systems and reduce the need for external support.

The theory focuses on empowerment of individuals through education and providing them with the knowledge, skill and strength to make informed decisions and take control of their lives. This helps build survivors' confidence and understanding of their rights, and increases the likelihood of disclosure (Gonzalez 2016). The theory also focuses on organizational empowerment – empowered schools, clinics and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) are more likely to provide trusted and convenient opportunities for reporting, and communities with these opportunities report more cases. Community empowerment also helps to diminish stigma through engaging traditional leaders, teachers and faith-based organizations to develop culturally appropriate reporting systems (Sethi & Lin, 2016). This is supported by evidence from Zimbabwe where it has been found that empowerment-based approaches, like the community approach developed by Nyamurera (2025) have led to improved reporting through culturally appropriate awareness-raising activities and local leadership engagement.

The Empowerment Theory is based on the premise that marginalized populations can learn to take action to change oppressive conditions and enhance their wellbeing. Barriers to reporting sexual abuse often include stigma, fear of retaliation, confidentiality and accessibility of reporting platforms. These barriers can be exacerbated when programmes are no longer funded from the donor, as out-reach services can be reduced, safe reporting channels can become less effective and institutional responses can become weaker. This theory thus provides some insight into the importance of bolstering community systems, the voice of the survivors and the availability of local resources for sustaining the reporting systems in resource-poor environments.

2.1.2 RELEVENCE OF THEORY TO THE STUDY

The approach of Empowerment Theory is central to this study as it provides a framework that is sustainable, locally appropriate and can be applied to enhance sexual abuse reporting processes in contexts where formal reporting mechanisms and donor-funded programmes have been weakened. It contains practical guidance on community-based alternatives which can help with long-term protection. The theory offers a solid analytical underpinning for understanding how the sexual abuse reporting can be continued beyond the end of USAID funding. Its focus on capacity building, participation and local ownership is very appropriate to consider some of the practical alternatives that can improve reporting. The study uses this framework to identify gaps that were formed due to funding withdrawal, as well as pathways to resilient, community-led reporting systems that can better support survivors in the long term.

The theory is connecting the dots between vulnerability and action. Although powerlessness is a common feeling among sexual abuse survivors, empowerment allows them to move from a passive to an active part in the justice process. This provides an opportunity to explore alternative processes and the empowerment of individuals, communities and organisations, which can help to re-distribute power from donor dependent processes to communities and survivors, and not to external support processes only. The theory is based on developing internal capacity, participation, critical awareness and collective action. Empowerment is especially relevant in situations where when a donor pulls out there is a gap in service as it fosters resilience and self-reliance in communities.

Empowerment at the individual level is to make the individual able to stand and fight for himself. Knowledge and support build confidence in survivors to report abuse and seek justice. Empowerment principles are reflected in alternatives like survivor education programs, confidential digital reporting systems, and peer support groups, which help to increase victims'

capacity to make decisions without relying on outside donors. This is in keeping with the study's aim to find ways to facilitate reporting even in situations where resources are limited.

The community level focuses on empowerment through a sense of community responsibility and social change. When communities are actively engaged in safeguarding, they are better placed to confront negative norms that perpetuate silence of survivors. Stigma can be decreased and reporting normalized through community awareness campaigns, involvement religious and traditional leaders, and grassroots advocacy. A collective approach is especially relevant to the study of sexual abuse as it is not just an individual problem, it is also a social problem influenced by cultural views, power dynamics and access to resources.

In the organizational dimension, the theory emphasizes institutions that facilitate people's participation, transparency and responsiveness. As a result of the end of funding for USAID, many organizations may be facing financial difficulties in maintaining reporting services. The empowerment theory assumes that local institutions can be strengthened, such as community-based organizations, social workers, schools and health facilities, to take on more responsibility. These can create alternative reporting pathways that are more culturally appropriate and sustainable through building local leadership and partnerships.

Zimbabwe's protection systems are vulnerable as a result of the withdrawal of USAID funding. It is therefore useful to draw on Empowerment Theory to offer a practical way to look for ways to sustain reporting mechanisms without high external donor dependence, which are also developed and controlled locally. But empowerment is not a substitute for structural support, (Dominelli, 2021) says that unless there is appropriate policy and resource investment, empowerment can be symbolic and not transformative. Empowerment Theory, therefore, offers a theoretical framework and an action plan for recognizing viable alternatives to donor-supported reporting systems.

2.2 CONCEPTUALISATION OF KEY PHENOMENA IN THE STUDY

2.2.1 SEXUAL ABUSE

Sexual abuse is defined as any sexual act, attempted sexual act, unwelcome sexual comment or advance made to a person using coercion, manipulation, or exploitation of power differentials, (WHO, 2021). This definition is purposefully expansive, and includes rape, attempted rape, and forced sexual touching, as well as sexual exploitation and child sexual abuse and harmful cultural practices of a sexual nature, as narrower definitional frameworks that only consider penetrative sexual acts have been known to systematically exclude the majority of experiences which survivors actually experience, leading to definitional invisibility, a form of silencing that precedes and compounds the institutional underreporting of sexual abuse (Barter & Aghtaie, 2022).

Sexual abuse in Zimbabwe has socio-legal connotations. The Criminal Law (Codification and Reform) Act [Chapter 9:23] includes gendered definitions of sexual offences such as rape, sexual assault, and sexual acts with youths; however, as Chitereka and Chikadzi (2019) point out, there is a gap between the codified definitions and the understanding of what constitutes a sexual offence by the community, especially in rural settings where some community norms may view sexual coercion as acceptable, such as within marriage or sanctioned by lobola. Muridzo and Chereni (2020) also show how cultural and religious belief systems in Zimbabwe are actively influencing the definition, naming and response to sexual violations, sometimes in very different ways to that of the formal statutory systems. This conceptual mismatch is also a structuring obstacle to reporting, as the survivors of such abuse are unlikely to be motivated to start formal reporting procedures if they don't consider their experiences to be legally defined abuse. The study therefore uses the legal term for sexual abuse and recognizes that cultural meanings may have emerged to influence the perception, naming and response to sexual abuse.

2.2.2 SEXUAL ABUSE REPORTING

Reporting of sexual abuse is conceptualised in this study not as a single discrete act but as a multi-stage, socially embedded process shaped at every point by the distribution of power between survivors, perpetrators, families, communities, and institutions. This study uses the disclosure framework created by Brubacher (2020) which differentiates disclosure (telling a trusted person about abuse) from formal reporting (informing an authoritative body like police, social services, healthcare provider). Both dimensions are important, because while disclosure to a community member, teacher, faith leader, or family member is a first and often crucial step which may or may not result in formal institutional disclosure, the factors that facilitate or impede each step are different. It is important to conceptualize reporting as a multi-stage process because this displays multiple opportunities for survivors to be empowered or disempowered, and therefore multiple intervention points for strategically designing alternatives.

The other prominent part of the conceptual framework of this study is non-disclosure (intentionally or coerced omission of abuse). which is directly connected with the nature of power issues addressed by Empowerment Theory. Non-disclosure, therefore, cannot be interpreted as a psychological lapse on the part of the survivors but as a rational survival strategy after a realistic appraisal of their social and institutional context shows that disclosure is riskier than staying silent. The non-reporting of rape by victims is a structurally produced outcome and not a choice by victims in rural Zimbabwe where perpetrators are likely to be the economically and socially powerful members of the community, the formal reporting infrastructure is geographically distant, institutional trust is low and disclosure may lead to exclusion or retaliation. This study therefore views underreporting as a systemic symptom of power imbalances at individual, community and institutional levels, which alternatives must be able to actively challenge, not work around.

2.2.3 USAID FUNDING WITHDRAWAL AND SERVICE DELIVERY

Withdrawal of USAID funding is theorised in this study as a structural disempowerment process that has disrupted communities, survivors, and local groups from relying on the material, institutional and relational resources they previously used to report and respond to sexual abuse. Sustained donor dependency, Moyo (2009), have pointed out, results in an environment where recipient communities and organisations are deprived of the motivation and internal capacity to establish self-sustaining systems, and external resources are always used in place of local ones. In Zimbabwe, critical infrastructure, trained personnel, referral networks, legal aid, community awareness programmes and data systems were all important elements of the protection system but were never resourced to be sustainable once the external funding stopped, (Mutasa, 2022). The 83% cut in USAID support has therefore not only led to a decrease in the volume of the services provided but has resulted in a structural breakdown of the empowerment networks that facilitated the access of survivors to the knowledge, resources, and institutional linkages they needed to make reporting possible and safe.

This conceptualisation has a direct impact on the design of alternatives. For the USAID model to have meant a system where the communities were empowered as recipients of services, and not as autonomous agents of protection, then sustainable alternatives must be fundamentally different; not about reproducing the provision of external services under different funding mechanisms, but about empowering communities to build their own agency and ownership, irrespective of the existence or continuation of any particular external service or resource. Ndlovu and Mashangaiko (2023) reinforce the importance of alternatives that are based on capacity building and empowerment and not the provision of services when those services are no longer available, as was the case following the exit of USAID.

2.2.4 ALTERNATIVES TO ENHANCE SEXUAL ABUSE REPORTING

For purposes of this study, "alternatives to improve sexual abuse reporting" are mechanisms, structures, and practices that can partially or fully substitute the functions of USAID-funded programmes, the functions of providing services to survivors, formal reporting support and facilitation, and the sharing of information and resources with community members, that rely on community agency and locally generated resources and institutional capacity rather than external donor financing. This conceptualization explicitly places the issue of empowerment in the spotlight, alternatives are not evaluated solely on the basis of whether they produce short-term gains in reporting statistics, but whether they enable the individual and collective empowerment of survivors and communities over time: to recognize abuse, to disclose it safely, to seek justice, and to hold institutions accountable. Guedes (2020), highlight the need for sexual abuse interventions to be both structural and empowering at the community level, tackling the underlying conditions of sexual abuse and the systemic factors that obstruct sexual abuse reporting at once.

The concept is designed to be broad community-based protection structures, technology-based reporting tools, faith-based referral systems, school-based education programmes, models of government domestic financing. Multiple complementary mechanisms at various social levels will be required for sustainability, and all taken together will form a new protection system that is owned, supported and led by communities, not by external actors. This study draws from Chambers' (1994) participatory development principle and the way it has been applied to the present by Devereux and Sabates-Wheeler (2022); the principle that only solutions co-created with or arising from the communities they serve can be truly sustainable and could be adopted by the communities.

2.3 GENERAL OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY

2.3.1 GLOBAL OVERVIEW

Sexual abuse is a global issue impacting millions of children and adults of all economic and cultural backgrounds. The issue is so immense that UNICEF (2024), estimates that more than 370 million girls and women globally have faced sexual violence in their childhood. In a similar vein, Barth (2013) revealed that 18–31% of girls and 8–17% of boys have been sexually abused prior to their 18th birthday and more recent data from the WHO (2021) indicated that this has not significantly improved, especially in low- and middle-income countries where protection systems are chronically under-resourced. Even with these shocking figures, the reporting rate is extremely low worldwide. Formal disclosure statistics are likely to underestimate the prevalence of abuse and a systematic review by London (2015) showed that less than a third of survivors disclosed during childhood, and only in some cases did they disclose immediately, with many disclosures occurring years or even decades later.

Shame, fears of perpetrators and retribution, limited access to reporting systems and lack of perceived institutional effectiveness continue to deter reporting in all regions. There have been a number of donor-funded programmes that have strengthened the reporting infrastructure for women and girls through helplines, shelters and survivor advocacy services, but the systems are fragile and at risk of collapsing when funding is removed elsewhere in the world (Edwards & Hulme, 2018). International norms, such as the Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC, 1989) and Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW, 1979) have binding obligations for the state parties to prevent, investigate and prosecute sexual violence and provide safe and accessible avenues for survivors to report. But, Jewkes (2015) points out that international legal frameworks are not enough to bring about improvements in reporting if not supported by long-term domestic investment in

implementation infrastructure, community education and survivor-centered institutional reform.

Since the adoption of the Beijing Platform for Action (1995), the global governance system to prevent and respond to sexual violence has undergone a dramatic transformation, with a special focus on the financing gap between what is internationally mandated and what is available at the local level. This financing deficit has been starkly evident in the wake of a sharp, sudden fall in gender-based violence programming, as key bilateral like USAID have shifted out of the sector, causing what Riddell (2022) calls a "protection cliff edge," which is the sudden, unplanned reduction of services, leaving survivors with no institutional options at the worst moments. The fragility of these structures has encouraged scholars and practitioners to propose other structures that are more resilient and rely on domestic financing. Digital innovations are becoming more and more important alternatives. Mobile-based reporting platforms can increase anonymity and accessibility, especially for youth survivors who are dissuaded from reporting face-to-face, Powell (2018). Slakoff (2022) has also shown that, when co-designed with survivor communities, technology-based reporting tools can substantially de-bureaucratize the process of reporting, removing significant barriers to disclosure and enhancing the quality of the documentation of cases in under-resourced contexts, suggesting that the future of technology-based solutions is likely to be a one where technology can complement and not rely on large-scale external funding.

2.3.2 REGIONAL OVERVIEW

Sub-Saharan Africa carries a disproportionate burden of sexual violence relative to other global regions. UNICEF (2023), reports that over 79 million girls and women in the region have experienced sexual abuse, representing nearly one-fifth of the global total concentrated in a region with significant resource constraints. The regional normative framework for addressing

sexual violence is anchored in the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights (1981) and its supplementary Protocol on the Rights of Women in Africa (Maputo Protocol, 2003), which explicitly mandate member states to enact and enforce laws prohibiting all forms of sexual violence and to provide adequate redress mechanisms for survivors. Additionally, the African Union's Agenda 2063 and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 5 (Gender Equality) and SDG 16 (Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions), provide regional policy targets that direct state resources toward elimination of sexual abuse and promotion of survivor access to justice. Despite these frameworks, compliance and implementation remain deeply inconsistent, particularly at the sub-national and community levels where reporting infrastructure is most inadequate.

Cultural norms in many parts of sub-Saharan Africa are deeply intertwined with patriarchal structures that systematically discourage disclosure. Jewkes (2015) argue persuasively that patriarchal authority and victim-blaming attitudes contribute substantially to underreporting across African societies, and subsequent research by Mwangi (2021), demonstrates that these attitudes are reinforced through community socialization processes beginning in childhood, making early educational intervention a critical prevention strategy. Institutional challenges further complicate the reporting landscape across the region: studies conducted in Kenya and Uganda found that survivors frequently encounter under-resourced police units, inadequately trained officers, and lengthy legal processes, all of which discourage survivors from pursuing justice (Chirwa 2018). The financing architecture for sexual violence programming across the region has been dominated by a handful of bilateral donors notably USAID, DFID/FCDO, and the European Commission creating structural dependency that renders entire national protection systems acutely vulnerable to donor policy changes. Chereni (2019), documents that in multiple Southern African states, the withdrawal or reduction of bilateral funding has produced measurable contractions in reporting rates, survivor support service availability, and

community-level protection capacity, reinforcing the case for domestically resourced and community-owned alternatives.

Community-led interventions have, however, shown considerable success in improving both disclosure and formal reporting rates across the region. Meinck (2017), observed markedly improved reporting rates in communities with trained child protection committees, and Guedes (2020), similarly found that community-based approaches integrating economic empowerment with survivor support produce more durable reductions in sexual abuse than those addressing legal access alone. Faith-based organizations have also played a critical role in promoting survivor support and reducing stigma, serving as culturally trusted intermediaries between affected individuals and formal systems. Scholars increasingly advocate for locally sustainable protection systems rather than donor-dependent frameworks, with Sidel (2021) arguing that the prioritization of local ownership and domestic resource mobilization is essential for long-term system resilience across sub-Saharan Africa. This regional consensus around local sustainability provides important conceptual grounding for examining what alternatives are suitable for Zimbabwe following the USAID withdrawal.

2.3.3 LOCAL OVERVIEW

Despite the high incidence of sexual abuse in Zimbabwe, there is a significant underreporting in the country and this has continued as a result of inconsistent funding cycles. However, disclosure rates as low as 9% for the first incidence of abuse in Zimbabwean communities, as reported by Masiyiwa (2020), shows a huge gap between the prevalence of the abuse and formal disclosures. Chibango (2022) observed that out of 69% of the women surveyed in Ruwa, only 2% had reported their experiences because of fear, shame and economic reliance on the perpetrators. These statistics point to the fact that the formal reporting systems to date are only

scratching the surface of actual abuse and this has a significant impact on holding perpetrators to account and providing survivors with adequate support.

In Zimbabwe there is a national legal and policy framework for sexual abuse reporting made up of a number of overlapping documents. Under Sections 51 and 52 of the Constitution of Zimbabwe (2013), Zimbabweans enjoy the Right to dignity, equality and freedom from all forms of violence. The Criminal Law (Codification and Reform) Act [Chapter 9:23] criminalizes sexual offences and sets up prosecutorial frameworks and the Domestic Violence Act [Chapter 5:16] sets up civil protection frameworks for survivors who are victims of intimate partner sexual violence. Under the Children's Act [Chapter 5:06] there are also protection obligations that relate to each child. The National Gender Policy (2013-2017, revised) and the National Action Plan on Gender Based Violence are policy guidance to the ministerial responsibilities towards coordinated service provision which includes facilitation of reporting. Muridzo and Chereni (2020), however, warn that the disconnect between the policy rhetoric and practice on the ground in rural communities is still significant, and that having been partially addressed by USAID-funded programmes, this disconnection has grown significantly since the funding was withdrawn.

Intrafamilial abuse is a form of abuse that is especially concealed in the Zimbabwean social fabric. Survivors often do not report because it helps to keep the family together, or it would result in economic or social upheaval, especially if the survivors are economically dependent on the abusive family members (Chitereka and Chikadzi 2019). This trend is starkly illustrated by Nyamurera (2025), who report that, in some cases, community gatekeepers such as village headmen, church elders, and extended family members discourage formal reporting and instead point to customary methods to resolve the issues, methods that seldom provide meaningful accountability or protection. Over the years, the USAID funded legal assistance, awareness and survivor services have partially addressed these challenges, but when donors leave, service

delivery is undermined and reporting capacity diminishes, which can take years to rebuild, as noted by Mutasa (2022). The drastic 83% cut in support from USAID has seen community programmes being closed and/or severely downsized leaving populations in rural districts like Gokwe South Ward 30 with limited access to reporting services (UNICEF Zimbabwe, 2024), signaling the need for sustainable community-based reporting services.

2.4 SEXUAL ABUSE REPORTING MECHANISMS AFTER THE END OF USAID FUNDING

2.4.1 FORMAL GOVERNMENT INSTITUTIONS

2.4.1.1 DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

The Department of Social Development (DSD) is a very important and legally mandated body as a reporting mechanism and a support structure for survivors of sexual abuse, and is especially involved in providing psychosocial services and protection to vulnerable individuals, especially children and women (Mathews, 2012). The department's social workers are statutorily mandated to receive and investigate reports of child abuse, to carry out comprehensive risk assessments and to plan for the safety and intervention of survivors and their families (Ferreira & Bowen, 2016). The mandate is supported by policies in Zimbabwe, including the Children's Act [Chapter 5:06] and the Domestic Violence Act [Chapter 5:16] and by the guidelines of the Ministry of Public Service, Labor and Social Welfare that make registered social workers the first point of call for reporting child abuse and gender-based violence at government level.

If sexual abuse is reported to the Department of Social Development, social workers have a duty to act, which is getting the child out of a risky situation, placing them in a safe space and starting a court process, including a protection order or a care and protection application. In addition to emergency intervention, the department offers continual counselling, trauma de-

briefs and case management to assist the survivors in reconstructing their lives and in reducing the impact of abuse (Kaminer et al., 2005). The DSD also liaises closely with hospitals and police for a coordinated response that will deal with the legal, emotional and social aspects of sexual abuse.

But the Department of Social Development in Gokwe South District is currently severely constrained in their ability to function effectively as a reporting mechanism in the post-USAID environment. Muridzo and Chereni (2020) report that DSD offices in rural districts are under resourced in terms of staffing levels to the number of cases, with only one social worker often covering several wards over a large geographic area, which makes it near impossible to respond to reported cases in a timely manner in remote communities like Ward 30. DSD was left without any supplementary resourcing from USAID funded NGO partners who previously provided community outreach workers, transport provision, and case documentation support, leading to an increased sense of isolation in the department and seriously reduced resourcing and community level reach (Ndlovu & Mashiangaiko, 2023). Accessibility and responsiveness of the DSD in Ward 30 is limited, and there is a need for community-based alternatives that can facilitate and support the DSD case management role, as the resource function mismatch means that, although the DSD is a legally recognized and institutionally legitimate reporting channel, it is not accessible or responsive in practice.

2.4.1.2 HOSPITAL VICTIM FRIENDLY UNITS

Hospital victim-friendly units are special units within public hospitals, which are specially created to provide immediate medical and psychosocial support services to sexual abuse survivors in a safe, confidential and non-judgemental manner (Christofides, 2005). They are manned by trained health care professionals (doctors, nurses, counsellors) who are capable of addressing the physical and psychological needs of survivors.

Several ways bring cases to the hospital victim-friendly unit. Survivors can present on their own, independently, with the hospital being their initial place of disclosure because of their medical needs or because they prefer a healthcare environment to a law enforcement environment. Some are referred by community-based organizations (CBOs) like village health workers, community leaders, NGOs working at grassroots level. Some cases are referred from police stations, e.g. if an officer believes that a medical examination is required before or in addition to a formal report is made. School officials, educators and child protection committees are other key referral sources, particularly for child survivors. Also, family, neighbors and guards/caregivers who have seen or heard about the abuse may bring in those affected. This multi-channel referral system is a result of the unit's function as a hub in a wider network of community responses, available whether or not the survivor has first contact with law enforcement.

A survivor who presents to a hospital victim-friendly unit is medically cared for, receives prophylactic medications for sexually transmitted infections, including HIV, and where necessary, emergency contraceptive pills; and is given psychological first-aid (Abrahams, 2014). A hospital victim friendly unit also specializes in taking forensic evidence that details any injuries or biological specimens that might be required for criminal proceedings. Because of this process, the unit takes great care to ensure that the hospital is a place that is considered by many survivors to be a safe place to seek help as they know that it is done with the highest level of sensitivity and respect for the dignity and body of the survivor.

Apart from the clinical treatment, the hospital victim friendly units provide a series of integrated victim support services. Continuing psychosocial supports are offered to help the survivors cope with the trauma, regain coping mechanisms and deal with the aftermath of abuse. For well-resourced units, survivor case management services are provided, which includes arranging follow-up visits, supporting adherence to HIV post-exposure prophylaxis

(PEP) and connecting with the legal or social welfare system. Some units have linkage procedures with legal aid and police victim support units to help survivors who want to take the path of criminal justice. Space and procedures are child friendly to accommodate young survivors, frequently through specially trained staff who communicate in age-appropriate ways. Units also act as a bridge to community-based support groups, safe houses, and long-term rehabilitation for survivors who need longer term rehabilitation. Where resources are available, health education and community awareness activities flow from these units, helping to build demand and minimize barriers to seeking assistance for at-risk groups.

2.4.1.3 POLICE VICTIM FRIENDLY UNITS

Police victim friendly units (VFUs) are special units within a police station set up to provide a safe, private and supportive environment for survivors of sexual abuse to report sex crimes without fear of stigma, intimidation or secondary victimisation (Vetten, 2014). They are staffed by specially-trained officers, sometimes female officers themselves, who have the knowledge and personality traits required to handle disclosures of sexual abuse in a professional and caring way (Sadan, 2001). Upon notification from a survivor to a police victim friendly unit, a police officer is able to take a formal statement, open a docket, and prescribe the process of the case through the justice system, including the rights of the survivor, the importance of evidence, and the expectations of the justice system (Vetten, 2008). A unit generally will have child-friendly interview rooms and private interview rooms for various survivors, including minors. In addition, police victim-friendly units operate in sync with hospital victim-friendly units and social workers to ensure that the survivors are referred to those most appropriate to the medical and psychosocial services, as no one should lose their dignity or emotional health when reporting a crime.

2.4.2 COMMUNITY BASED CHILD PROTECTION COMMITTEES (CPCS)

Community Based Child Protection Committees (CPCs) have been found or continued to function as an important informal and semi-formal reporting mechanism in rural communities, including Gokwe South, Zimbabwe, where formal NGOs are no longer present as a result of the termination of funding by USAID. CPCs are volunteer groups of people in the community who collaborate to provide support, information, referrals and monitoring to protect children in their immediate community. Before the exit of USAID, their significance in rural areas where formal institutions are geographically out of reach was already well documented in the literature, and is now more relevant and important in the post-exit phase. Two of the pillars of child protection in Zimbabwe are CPCs, which are deployed in the community, and community-based child protection committees (CPCs) and community case workers (CCWs), who are also embedded in the community as the first line of informal protection response as documented in the national case management literature.

CPCs have reactive and proactive pathways of identifying and receiving cases of sexual abuse. Reactively, cases get to the CPC when a survivor, family member, neighbor or peer reveals abuse to a committee member, demonstrating the level of trust a CPC has built within their community through the presence and locally recognized authority. Many rural communities will know the CPC member, who may be a teacher, a church elder, a village health worker, or a respected woman whose knowledge of the situation reduces the stigma or risk of speaking out, especially for children. In a proactive sense, CPCs are able to spot cases through community monitoring and home visits, when they might notice that a child has changed behavior, body marks, has poor attendance at school or has withdrawn. CPCs also conduct community awareness building activities that educate community members to look for and report signs of abuse, and thus expand the committee's protective mandate beyond the committee itself. After the case is identified or reported, the CPC member makes a preliminary,

informal assessment to determine the nature and urgency of the concern. In case of immediate safety risk, the CPC's first choice is to refer the victim to the police, social welfare officers, hospital victim friendly unit or other health facilities. In cases where monitoring instead of immediate statutory actions are required, the CPC may be able to allocate a community case worker to regularly check in with the child and family and to record observations, as well as orchestrating a community level response, such as family counselling, peer support or contact with leaders in the community. Case records are kept throughout this process, although documentation quality and consistency varies depending on the stationery, training and supervisory oversight and referral linkages are available and ensure that cases are not lost between community and institutional systems (Matsika et al., 2020).

However, CPCs continue to be used as a reporting mechanism in Gokwe South despite the scaling back of NGO-funded programming, with the evidence base on their effectiveness beyond USAID to date needing to be generalized from the broader district and provincial data. In 14 Zimbabwean districts, for example, UNICEF Zimbabwe (2022) reported on the placement of case management officers alongside community childcare workers, leading to 68,000 children benefiting from care and protection services, even in the absence of external funding contracts, as long as some level of institutional support is maintained, which illustrates how community-based structures can continue to provide meaningful protective function. The difficulty in Gokwe South however is that even the structures at CPC level require logistical inputs, transport, communication tools, training and basic operational support, which were previously provided by USAID-funded organizations and no longer exist.

2.4.3 RELIGIOUS AND TRADITIONAL AUTHORITY STRUCTURES AS INFORMAL REPORTING CHANNELS

The third major reporting system in rural Zimbabwean communities after the withdrawal of donors is the use of existing traditional and religious authority, as an informal first-line reporting system. In Ward 30 (Gokwe South), the community members adopt religious and traditional reporting systems through church leaders, pastors, village headmen and community elders who are the most accessible and trusted adults to whom sexual abuse is disclosed. Reporting mechanisms are put in place for these leaders because they are physically accessible in the community, are personally familiar to the survivors and have social and cultural authority that renders disclosure to them safer than disclosure to formal institutions. Although they do not have a statutory mandate, religious and traditional leaders have an informal mandate from the community, based on their social and cultural roles as community guardians, conflict mediators and moral authorities.

Religious and traditional leaders are usually contacted informally in regard to handling cases, they counsel survivors and their families and, in some instances, try to settle cases informally via customary mediation processes or direct survivors to formal institutions. In rural Zimbabwean communities, survivors often sought these informal channels of disclosure first, especially when formal ones were not accessible or trusted, as found by Mapiko and Chinyoka (2017). As externally funded intermediary services have phased out, and communities have reverted to social structures existing before donor funding involvement, their role as reporting mechanisms has been given a new importance in the post-USAID era. Religious leaders and traditional authorities have remained an informal channel of reporting and referral. This is supported by a study conducted by Muridzo (2024), where court files from Harare were analyzed and highlighted that the traditional systems and faith communities are very relevant in managing disclosures of sexual abuse at community level, frequently being the first point of

contact for a disclosure and the initial point of response. Muridzo and Chereni (2020) also report that religious and traditional leaders in Zimbabwean communities have cultural and spiritual authority which makes it easier for survivors to disclose to them than to the formal institutions, especially when they have little trust in the police and courts. Also, the United Nations in Zimbabwe (2022) reported that Musasa and GOAL Zimbabwe maintained their engagement with the community and religious leaders as frontline mobilisers, who were trusted by the community and so used to advocate for reporting of Sexual abuse. Yet, informal arrangements, while affording cultural and geographical access not available with formal systems in Ward 30, have also been subject of concerns about accountability, confidentiality and whether disclosures are reported to formal systems or are otherwise dealt with in ways that do not necessarily prioritizes survivor justice.

2.4.4 CELL PHONE AND SMS-BASED REPORTING.

Cell phone and SMS reporting is becoming well established in Zimbabwe as a valuable supplement to the formal institutional reporting systems, especially due to the proliferation of mobile phone sub-industry providing access to mobile communication networks in both rural and urban settings. This is where reporting is by phone calls or messages sent to district officers. The use of mobile communication has been extended to government departments such as the Department of Social Development, where Social Welfare officers and community focal persons are available on the phone as part of the district level case management and referral system, and the Zimbabwe Republic Police (ZRP). This has created a common practice in many communities to use the mobile phone as an informal reporting mechanism to connect disclosure at the community level to response at the institutional level, especially in rural areas where survivors and their families would otherwise find in-person reporting to be a challenging and onerous process because of distance and underdeveloped transport links.

Cell phone and SMS-based reporting have become a viable and growing reporting modality in the post-USAID era in rural wards such as Ward 30, Gokwe South, where community members can directly use their own or borrowed cell phones to reach out to Social Welfare officers at the Department of Social Development (DSD) offices, report cases to police or notify known community level responders. This is done because community members and survivors know that they can call directly into the Social Welfare offices, and the contact information of those officers is disseminated via community engagement, NGO outreach, or word of mouth. For many survivors in areas such as Ward 30, where formal services have scaled back since the end of USAID funding and community members or survivors may be several kilometers away from the closest DSD office so it is difficult to reach them, the mobile phone is one of the few reporting options that does not involve physical or financial travel on foot. According to Postal and Telecommunications Regulatory Authority of Zimbabwe (POTRAZ, 2023), mobile phone penetration, in particular, is at around 96% of the adult population at the national level, indicating that in principle, there is no geographical barrier to accessing cell phone and SMS reporting even in the most rural areas.

In reality, cell phone and SMS-based reporting in Ward 30 is carried out in a number of informal but well understood ways. A community member who has been made aware of a case of sexual abuse can call a Social Welfare officer directly to report and seek guidance on what to do next, the officer will then instruct them on documenting, a safety plan or whatever steps they need to take to formalize the report. If the calling is not possible because of network limitations or because of the lack of airtime, SMS text messages are sent to a Social Welfare officer or a known community focal person who will escalate the case through the formal means available to them. Village headmen, CPCs and other community leaders also use MPs to coordinate with each other and with the officers at the district level, passing on information about cases disclosed to them and helping with follow-up, which otherwise may involve

multiple visits to the institutional venues by the survivor. Mobile reporting is also low cost and relatively confidential, and would be well suited to survivors who do not wish to be seen in a police station or government office, as a phone call or SMS can be made without anyone knowing. But inconsistencies in network coverage in remote areas of Gokwe South District, expense of airtime for economically marginalized survivors, limited and irregular presence of Social Welfare officers to receive and act on calls which have been forwarded due to staff shortages at the DSD, and the lack of a structured, monitored SMS reporting protocol which would ensure that cases forwarded by phone are systematically recorded and followed up, are a significant constraint on the practical utility of this mechanism in Ward 30. Within rural communities of Zimbabwe, awareness is low about the availability of reporting pathways using cell phones, especially among the most marginalized and at the same time most vulnerable to sexual abuse, in not knowing which numbers to call or accessing responsive officers through mobile phone platforms (Chibango, 2022).

2.5 EFFECTIVENESS OF SEXUAL ABUSE REPORTING MECHANISMS IN WARD 30, GOKWE SOUTH

2.5.1 FORMAL GOVERNMENT INSTITUTIONS

2.5.1.1 DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

Despite the changes, the Department of Social Development continues to be an important institutional reporting point for sexual abuse as a legal requirement, its professional capacity and referral networks. It is situated in a clear statutory context in the Children's Act and the Domestic Violence Act, with Social Welfare Officers being able to receive reports, to investigate, and to take action to protect the survivor. It is linked to the police and health services and courts, providing a multisectoral referral pathway that ensures that cases are not dealt with in isolation, but rather a coordinated response system in which cases are processed.

The presence of the Department at the community level creates a familiar and legitimate reporting mechanism with state authority and legal standing which is recognized by survivors, especially children and women.

But chronic under funding, acute staff shortage and limited geographic coverage, especially in remote rural areas such as Ward 30, Gokwe South, severely limit the Department's performance, with sometimes a few Social Welfare Officers responsible for large districts and with massive caseloads. The loss of USAID funding in 2025 has also led to diminished operational capacity, including fewer community outreach and survivor follow-up services, as well as fewer psychosocial services. Timely responding to reported cases of sexual abuse is extremely difficult due to high caseloads, poor infrastructure and insufficient transport. In addition to limited resources, deep-rooted community issues like stigma, cultural silence on sexual abuse, fear of family breakdown, and mistrust of formal institutions also deter sexual abuse survivors from approaching the Department and many cases of sexual abuse remain unreported and unresolved in the formal system.

2.5.1.2 THE VICTIM FRIENDLY SYSTEM

Geographical, resource and institutional challenges which have been documented extensively in the scholarly literature have a significant negative impact on the effectiveness of the Victim Friendly System (VFS) as a reporting strategy in Gokwe South District, Ward 30. Benefits of the VFUs, such as in raising public awareness of sexual violence, ensuring better management of cases and helping children avoid re-traumatization in formal courts, have not been seen in a meaningful way in the most remote rural wards of districts such as Gokwe South, meaning that rural populations are underserved and more vulnerable to sexual violence. (Safe Futures Hub, 2025). Qualitative study findings specific to Gokwe are particularly telling: rape kits, used to collect evidence, have been unavailable on occasion; and the reduction in funding has almost

certainly exacerbated this lack of resources, with NGO organizations that used to fill the gaps in VFS resources also having been reduced.

The VFS currently in operation in Ward 30 cannot perform the basic empowerment roles that a good reporting system should provide from an Empowerment Theory perspective. On the intrapersonal empowerment level, survivors who are stopped by the VFS due to it being inaccessible and under-resourced are likely to develop reinforced internalized beliefs that formal reporting is not worth attempting, the most critical barrier to behavior change, identified by Zimmerman (2000). Analysis of the multi-sectoral VFS in Zimbabwe by Muridzo and Malianga (2015) revealed that there was a high level of indicated gaps in implementation, inadequate resources, and coordination failures affecting the capacity of the multi-sectoral VFS to ensure integrated survivor-centered responses, especially in rural district contexts. Musiwa (2018) also reported that although the introduction of the VFU framework introduced a more structured approach to supporting the needs of victims in the formal justice system, there were implementation gaps, such as resource constraints and accessibility issues, which meant that basic health and legal service costs were borne by the victims, costs which are relatively high for most families in Ward 30. VFS is therefore more of a nominal availability reporting strategy than telling the truth about what is effective for most survivors.

2.5.2 COMMUNITY BASED CHILD PROTECTION COMMITTEES

The reporting strategy with arguably the greatest potential for effectiveness in Ward 30, Gokwe South is community-based child protection committees, which are operating at community level where access barriers are lowest in terms of geography and institutional access, as well as the highest level of cultural trust. The Zimbabwe evidence and literature in sub-Saharan Africa generally shows that, with the right support, CPCs do lead to a measurable increase in sexual abuse reporting. The results of the study conducted by Meinck (2017) showed that

communities with trained child protection committees had significantly higher disclosure rates and rates of formal referral compared to similar communities that did not have child protection committees. UNICEF Zimbabwe (2022) further showed that community childcare workers, who were integrated into communities, were effective in cases of child and adolescent abuse and referral to formal services, especially when complemented with case management officers with coordination capacity at district-level. The multisectoral Zimbabwe child protection literature also shows that CPCs are often well placed to mediate with families and authorities, to provide direct support to child survivors, and to refer child survivors and families to the relevant service providers, as their community standing and contact allows them to intervene in ways that external service providers cannot (Muridzo & Malianga, 2015).

Yet, the impact of the CPCs in Ward 30 is severely limited by the lack of resources and capacity that occurred as a result of programme closures and withdrawal of USAID funding. Scholarly evidence also suggests that even prior to the complete exit by USAID, CPC volunteers were subjected to heavy logistical restrictions, such as unusable bicycles, impassable roads during the rainy season, and geographic coverage that required that a single volunteer cover long distances. The community engagement approaches that were effective in increasing knowledge and willingness to report child sexual abuse, as highlighted by Shaw et al. (2021), however, needed ongoing facilitation and support for sustained behavioral change, which has become reduced since USAID programmes have closed in Gokwe South Ward 30. The major constraints affecting CPC effectiveness are the total lack of operational resources (e.g. transport, airtime, communication tools etc.) after programme closures, the absence of the coordination setup, previously used for linking CPCs to social workers and police at district level and the risk of CPC coming under stress due to lack of institutional support. CPCs are the strongest existing system for community-level case reporting in Ward 30, as they are already in place, known to the community, and are willing to make decisions. The research found that

their being ineffective now is not due to any inadequacy of the structure but due to a shortage of resources. Even small investments that are sustainable and suitable to the local context, such as providing CPCs with transport allowances, communication tools, and monthly coordination meetings with the Department of Social Development, could go a long way in restoring the effectiveness of CPCs as a primary reporting mechanism without reinsituating the external dependency that defined the USAID model.

2.5.3 RELIGIOUS AND TRADITIONAL AUTHORITY CHANNELS

In rural Zimbabwe, religious institutions are often the first place with which the community members have regular contact and trust outside the family, giving the religious institutions a comparative advantage in first disclosures from survivors who do not wish to contact police or formal NGOs as confirmed by Manyeruke and Hamauswa (2020). Faith and traditional leaders have proven to be able to positively influence reporting rates when they have the right training and are integrated into formal referral systems.

But the traditional and religious authority reporting channels are significantly undermined by a systemic tendency to settle cases privately and within a family context, thereby keeping such cases out of formal accountability channels. Muridzo's (2024) qualitative research gives direct evidence of the active involvement of cultural myths, religious beliefs and customary practices in the management of sexual abuse, which do not necessarily involve formal reporting, such as the handling of sexual abuse cases through fines paid to the family of the injured party, without the need for criminal prosecution in the court of law through the use of the dare (traditional court). Muridzo and Chereni (2020) also suggest that this customary way of resolving conflict is not just a matter of choice, but rather a cultural logic, which must be approached critically by empowerment-based interventions instead of simply trying to circumvent. Fear of re-victimization, such as being blamed, shamed, doubted and/or faced with family disruption,

were the main reasons why survivors in Zimbabwe did not report even to trusted community figures, indicating that religious and traditional channels are only effective as reporting channels when they are actively survivor-centered and trained to respond without judgment (Obong'o, 2020).

2.5.4 CELL PHONE AND SMS BASED REPORTING

Cell phone and SMS-based reporting is effective in Ward 30 because it offers a relatively easy, anonymous and prompt reporting option for a person who is a victim or survivor of sexual abuse, in situations where it may be hard for them to access formal institutions. Mobile phone reporting provides survivors with an avenue to report abuse without having to speak directly to a police officer, in an area where access to police stations is limited, transport is sparse, and people are afraid of being recognized. This feature makes it especially useful where survivors might not come forward because of stigma, financial constraints or geographical isolation, for example in situations where a mobile phone is used for reporting. The mechanism is particularly useful in the post-USAID environment where community outreach structures and NGOs reporting systems have been severely eroded, with survivors having less options for seeking assistance.

There is regional evidence that supports the effectiveness of mobile and SMS based reporting mechanisms. Fry et al. (2022) determined that SMS GBV reporting systems in four African countries resulted in a 40% rise in GBV disclosures compared to areas without SMS reporting mechanisms. This shows that technology-based reporting systems can successfully engage those survivors who are not able or willing to use institutionalized reporting systems. Cell phone and SMS-based reporting is an important reporting mechanism to help extend the opportunities for disclosure and the chance of abuse being brought to the attention of protection

actors in Ward 30, where many communities are remote and formal protection systems are far away.

Empowerment Theory is another way of understanding the effectiveness of cell phone and SMS-based reporting. Mobile reporting mechanisms afford intrapersonal empowerment, offering survivors the opportunity to report abuse privately and independently. Communication via phone call or text message helps to eliminate the intimidation that may be felt around the police station or community meeting. Furthermore, cell phone and SMS-based reporting creates an opportunity to empower individuals through interaction, connecting survivors with people or systems that can offer them guidance, information, referrals and emotional support. The anonymity of mobile reporting promotes disclosure, as survivors may be reluctant to talk about it in settings where they are afraid of victim blaming or social backlash.

However, there are several contextual factors that limit the impact of cell phone and SMS reporting in Ward 30. The mobile network connectivity in remote areas of the ward is poor and this in itself has a detrimental effect on the mechanism, with calls often not going through and SMS messages not arriving in a timely manner. This decreases the reporting process consistency and responsiveness, especially in urgent protection cases. In addition, the lack of USAID funding helped to bring down a number of community awareness programmes that used to inform communities about available reporting options. This leaves many survivors and community members unaware of the existence and effectiveness of cell phone/SMS reporting.

Limited institutional response capacity at the district level is also a constraint on the effectiveness of cell phone and SMS-based reporting. However, when survivors have managed to report abuse via their mobile device, poor or late follow-up actions can make them less confident in the process and less inclined to report abuse again. The effectiveness of any reporting system is not only related to the capacity to share the information, but also on the

speed and quality of the institutional response which follows. Sometimes the coordination is weak and transport facilities are limited which can make timely action following a report difficult in Ward 30 due to the many protection services that need to be stretched thin.

Chibango (2022) also noted that awareness of reporting mechanisms in mobile and phone environments among rural women in Zimbabwe is extremely low, with many women indicating that they were not aware of formal reporting mechanisms through mobile and phone platforms. This is similar to Ward 30 where lack of donor supported community sensitisation programmes has resulted in less public awareness of alternative reporting options. Therefore, cell phone and SMS reporting has great practical potential but is presently hampered by low awareness, low connectivity and low institutional responsiveness.

Since the reporting system is accessible to the researcher, confidential and will not be hindered by geographical restrictions, cell phone and SMS-based reporting is one of the most potentially effective low-cost reporting systems in Ward 30 from researcher's perspective. But it can only be really effective if there are systems in place to facilitate awareness and prompt institutional action. Ensuring mobile network access, creating community awareness campaigns with a targeted audience, and developing the mechanisms for response at the district level would make the cell phone and SMS-based reporting an even more effective and sustainable pathway for reporting sexual abuse in the post-USAID landscape.

2.6 ALTERNATIVES TO ENHANCE SEXUAL ABUSE REPORTING POST USAID FUNDING

2.6.1 CAPACITY BUILDING AND TRAINING OF TRADITIONAL AND RELIGIOUS LEADERS

Capacity building and training of traditional and religious leaders is one of the most sustainable and culturally relevant alternatives to enhance responses to sexual abuse cases post-USAID.

Traditional leaders, village chiefs, pastors and church leaders are often the initial entry point for survivors, as they are well known, easily reached and live within the community. Providing these leaders with knowledge and practical skills for identification of sexual abuse, survivor-centered response, referral processes, confidentiality and child protection principles can greatly improve the community-level response to cases of sexual abuse. Zimmerman (2000) defines empowerment as empowerment occurs when people and communities take the skills, knowledge and confidence to be able to influence and respond to challenges faced. Community leaders are empowered as actors to provide survivors with the necessary support and connect them with formal protection mechanisms through specialized training.

This is line with the United Nations PSEA project, delivered through GOAL Zimbabwe and Musasa, provides a directly relevant precedent for this alternative. To mobilize community and religious leaders to report cases of sexual exploitation and abuse, and to ensure a survivor-centered approach to responding to disclosures, the project used roadshows, jingles, skits, and media outreach campaigns across Zimbabwe's ten provinces. These campaigns treated leaders as active agents of change and not just targets of awareness messages, thus reflecting the collective empowerment aspect that (Batliwala,1994) has found to be fundamental to shifting the structure of community norms. The incorporation of ongoing training via existing local structures (such as the Zimbabwe Council of Churches and local traditional leadership networks) would give community leaders the interactional empowerment capacity (Zimmerman, 2000) to lead survivors through reporting processes, link them with available institutional support, and to collectively advocate for more responsive institutions in Ward 30.

The effectiveness of training of traditional and religious leaders can further be understood through the Empowerment Theory (ET), which emphasizes critical awareness and problem-solving ability in communities (Zimmerman, 2000). Training helps leadership to have a better understanding of the dynamics of sexual abuse, legal reporting requirements, referral processes

and psychosocial support options and increases their competency and confidence in responding to cases. Batliwala (1994) also suggests that empowerment is a process of increasing the collective power to confront harmful social norms and structures. By training and skills development, traditional and religious leaders can then play a key role as voices of change in their communities to speak up against silence, stigma, and blaming the victim.

In the same vein, Muridzo (2024,) calls for the mainstreaming of traditional and religious leaders in formal child protection referral and response systems to ensure sustainable reporting and response to sexual abuse in communities with limited resources. The provision of ongoing trainings, referral guidance and simple reporting tools might be important in Ward 30 to improve leaders' effective response to survivors and build collaborative community and formal protection relationships.

2.6.2 STRENGTHENING AND RESOURCING OF COMMUNITY-BASED CHILD PROTECTION COMMITTEES

The second, high-potential alternative to the status quo that can enhance sexual abuse reporting is the strengthening and resourcing of community-based child protection committees. The idea is based on the recognition that, even with modest investments of resources, this change could considerably enhance the effectiveness of CPCs as a reporting mechanism, especially given that they are already in place, motivated and knowledgeable about community-level cases. CPCs strengthened under the mandate will receive disclosures at the community level and conduct initial risk assessments, referring cases to formal institutions, and monitoring follow up, providing a community based first line of reporting mechanism between survivors and formal government institutions. UNICEF Zimbabwe (2022) is a good case in point of the feasibility of this approach in Zimbabwe, with community childcare workers, supported through a case management system, helping 68,000 children gain access to child-care and

protection services, thus proving a community-embedded protection mechanism can have meaningful outcomes, given at least a basic level of institutional support. Muridzo & Malianga (2015) also concluded that the positive impact of CPC volunteers on child protection outcomes was directly connected to the amount of logistical and coordination support they received, and that even minimal investments in transport and communication could significantly enhance the rates of child protection case identification and referral.

2.6.3 COMMUNITY-BASED AWARENESS CAMPAIGNS UTILISING INDIGENOUS COMMUNICATION STRUCTURES

Awareness campaigns which run within community and use indigenous communication systems are a highly relevant and sustainable alternative for sexual abuse reporting. Traditional governance bodies like village meetings, church gatherings, customary courts, and traditional ceremonies, though less well documented than formal awareness programmes, are common and hold significant influence for information dissemination and influencing community behavior in rural communities where formal awareness programmes have stalled with the loss of USAID funding. The importance of using these existing structures to deliver sexual abuse awareness campaigns is that they are trusted, accepted culturally, and can reach large portions of the community without having to spend large amounts of money. This constitutes an effective approach to low awareness of sexual abuse, rights for survivors and reporting avenues.

Community-based awareness building is significant because it can break the silence, stigma and culture associated with non-reporting of sexual abuse. Many Ward 30 survivors do not report abuse for multiple reasons including fear, shame, lack of knowledge, and pressure from family and community members to not report. Community education and awareness-raising initiatives that utilize indigenous communication channels can help to enhance knowledge and

understanding of sexual abuse, highlight the need for reporting, and foster positive attitudes towards survivors. Empowerment, as described in Zimmerman's (2000) Empowerment Theory, starts with raising the awareness and understanding of problems that impact the individual. Awareness sessions are repeated in the community spaces where survivors and community members are more likely to become aware of what is abuse, to whom to report it and to seek protection and justice.

The effectiveness of indigenous communication structures in disseminating awareness has been endorsed by Makoni (2023) who noted that community-centred awareness dissemination campaigns about gender-based violence in rural Zimbabwe had a 'norm diffusion effect', that is information disseminated at community gatherings disseminated informally to greater numbers of people beyond the direct recipients of the information. This is proof of the ability of indigenous communication systems to create awareness and impact community attitudes towards reporting of sexual abuse. Likewise, Solomon (1976) states that interventions that emphasize empowerment are best done when they strengthen the community's own resources and capacities, not when they are totally dependent on outside structures. In Ward 30, there are existing, legitimate, indigenous communication structures which have social influence and are well positioned to convey sexual abuse awareness messages.

In addition, community-based awareness programs are cost-effective and feasible in resource-limited environments because they make use of existing community resources instead of cost-intensive new programs or infrastructure. Awareness messages can be readily incorporated into regular community activities through working with social workers, traditional leaders, religious leaders and community volunteers. It is therefore a culturally responsive, cost-effective and sustainable way of increasing sexual abuse disclosures in Ward 30 and empowering the community to take ownership of child protection and child sexual abuse survivor support efforts.

2.6.4 TECHNOLOGY-FACILITATED REPORTING TOOLS ADAPTED FOR RURAL CONTEXT

Technology enabled reporting processes are a fourth possible option for better reporting of sexual abuse in Ward 30, if they can be appropriately developed to take into consideration the connectivity, literacy and social context of rural communities that are far removed. There is a strong theoretical justification for this alternative in Empowerment Theory, which suggests that digital technologies enable anonymous and discreet disclosure that will overcome both intrapersonal barriers (shame, fear of being exposed publicly) and interactional barriers (lack of knowledge about formal reporting pathways) that currently hinder reporting in Ward 30. Specifically, Ndawana and Chisambiro (2024) record the empowerment potential of technology tools in the Zimbabwean context, and state that social media and digital platforms have opened up new avenues for disclosure which previously did not exist for women and girls. Fry et al (2022), also provide empirical evidence that SMS reporting systems in the sub-Saharan context led to significant improvements in disclosure rates, indicating that technology-assisted reporting systems can connect with survivors who would not seek out formal institution-based reporting systems.

In the case of Ward 30, the most feasible technology product is to have a code-based system that works on basic feature phones rather than relying on having an internet connection or a smartphone, which will ensure an improved reach to rural communities with limited data connectivity but having mobile coverage. This model is very suitable in rural Zimbabwe where it is a USSD-based reporting system where survivors can report directly to trained responders and survivor support referral pathways. This tool would have to be used in conjunction with two additional investments, a community awareness campaign, something that could be achieved through schools, a community meeting, and a church gathering, all without significant cost; and a trained response team with district-level capacity to receive, acknowledge and

follow up on responses made on the system, so that digital disclosure leads to meaningful institutional response rather than being lost in the under-resourced system.

2.6.5 ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT AS A FOUNDATION FOR REPORTING

One of the key, yet often neglected, alternatives to better reporting on sexual abuse is economic empowerment and its incorporation into protection programming to break the economic power dynamics that currently enable abusers to keep survivors in a position of economic dependency and thus silence them. It is crucial to acknowledge that material factors may prevent a survivor from reporting regardless of their awareness or any changes in community structures and cell phone/SMS-based access, and that an economically dependent victim of domestic violence has rational material grounds not to report even if there is increased awareness or access to community structures or cell phone/SMS improvements. Clearly, sustainable gender-based violence interventions need to include economic empowerment initiatives such as savings groups, vocational training and income-generating projects and have to go beyond providing legal and psychosocial support in isolation to the economic conditions that affect the viability of reporting.

The most local evidence for this integrated empowerment approach in Zimbabwe is the work of the Bethany Project's Pamumvuri Forums. The project created 25 community-based safe spaces for economic empowerment and awareness and support of gender-based violence, with a total of 762 women and girls benefiting in rural Zimbabwe. The support of the economic program and the awareness of rights were reported to have resulted in "measurable gains" in self-esteem and confidence, which facilitated the disclosure and reporting behavior that participants described as previously "unthinkable" (UN Women, 2022). Empirical evidence in Zimbabwe supports this alternative by showing that a cash-plus programme in that country led to a decrease in youth exposure to physical violence, thus confirming the direct measurable

impact of economic empowerment interventions on violence outcomes (Chakrabarti et al., 2020). Thereby facilitating disclosure among victims who are silenced due to dependency on the abuser.

2.7 RESEARCH GAPS

2.7.1 POST-USAID FUNDING KNOWLEDGE GAP

While extensive research exists on sexual abuse reporting systems and services for survivors of sexual abuse, the majority of this research occurred when donor-funded programmes were in operation. As a result, there is not a clear understanding of the functioning of sexual abuse reporting procedures following the end of significant donor support. The loss of USAID funding has had a huge impact on the protection landscape, and it is unclear how sustainable, accessible, and effective current reporting systems are. However, there is a need to understand how communities are coping with these changes and to find sustainable alternatives that will sustain reporting mechanisms without external funding.

2.7.2. RESEARCH GAP FOR RURAL COMMUNITY

The literature on sexual abuse reporting is mainly from urban and peri-urban areas with relatively good access to reporting institutions and support services. Much less is known about remote rural areas where survivors may be further challenged by distance, lack of infrastructure, culture, and lack of professional support staff. Consequently, very little information is available on the specific problems around reporting of sexual abuse in a rural setting like Ward 30, Gokwe South and there is therefore a need for context specific research.

2.7.3 COMMUNITY-BASED ALTERNATIVES GAP

There has been a significant amount of literature on formal reporting systems (police, hospital, social welfare department, etc.) and not much research into community-based, low-cost options which can sustain themselves when donor-funded programs disappear or are cut back. Little is known from existing studies on how to mobilize local structures, community participation and indigenous resources to improve reporting systems. This is a missing link on sustainable solutions that can be adopted and managed by communities.

2.7.4 TECHNOLOGY-FACILITATED REPORTING GAP

Technology-based reporting systems have been identified as a potential method of improving sexual abuse reporting by providing more accessibility, confidentiality and convenience. There has however been little research on their applicability and sustainability in rural Zimbabwean communities where there are still network coverage problems, low digital literacy and limited access to communication technologies. In addition, there is a lack of knowledge on how technology-supported reporting can be used to perform well in a post-donor funding period, and the potential for technology-supported reporting to sustain reporting should be explored as well.

2.8 STATUTORY INSTRUMENTS

2.8.1 UN CONVENTION ON THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD (CRC), 1989

The most widely adopted human rights treaty in the world. The convention requires state parties to ensure children are safeguarded against all types of sexual abuse and exploitation. It is enforced by national laws, child protection policies and state reporting to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child on a regular basis, which monitors compliance and provides recommendations.

2.8.2 AFRICAN CHARTER ON THE RIGHTS AND WELFARE OF THE CHILD (ACRWC), 1990

The ACRWC is the African version of the CRC but adapted to African cultural and economic circumstances. Article 16 provides that the State has the duty to protect children from sexual abuse and exploitation. It is used via the African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACERWC) which monitors state reports and receives complaints about sexual abuse violations among others.

2.8.3 MAPUTO PROTOCOL, 2003

The Maputo Protocol is the leading legal document in Africa that pertains to the rights of women. Article 4 requires African States to pass laws that ban all forms of sexual violence, and provide access to justice for survivors. It involves member states enacting its provisions and commitments into domestic law, providing financial support for survivor support services and reporting back to the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights on measures taken.

2.8.4 SADC PROTOCOL ON GENDER AND DEVELOPMENT, 2008

Applies to all Southern African Development Community member states including Zimbabwe. This Protocol includes regional benchmarks related to gender equality and GBV response, such as criminalizing all forms of sexual violence, having survivor-centred legal frameworks and mainstreaming gender in development programming. It is delivered via SADC peer review processes and national gender action plans used to implement policy at country level.

2.4.5 CONSTITUTION OF ZIMBABWE AMENDMENT (NO. 20) ACT 2013

Serves as the supreme legal framework underpinning all responses to sexual violence in Zimbabwe. Key provisions collectively establish that every person is constitutionally protected from sexual abuse whether from public or private sources. The Constitution handles sexual

violence by creating a normative foundation that all subordinate legislation must conform to, enabling survivors to seek constitutional remedies directly through the courts, and placing a positive obligation on the state at every level to prevent, investigate, and remedy sexual violence.

2.8.5 CRIMINAL LAW (CODIFICATION AND REFORM) ACT [CHAPTER 9:23]

The main criminal law governing and punishing rape, aggravated indecent assault and sexual abuse; Sections 65-70 are specifically concerned with sexual offences.

2.8.6 DOMESTIC VIOLENCE ACT [CHAPTER 5:16]

The act explicitly includes sexual abuse within the definition of domestic violence; provides for protection orders. It Covers sexual abuse occurring in domestic relationships, including forced marriage, child marriage, sexual intimidation, and other forms of gender-based violence.

2.9 CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter provided a comprehensive review of the literature relevant to the study of sexual abuse reporting, focusing on global, regional, and local overviews, the theoretical framework and its relevance to the study, as well as sexual abuse reporting mechanisms operating after USAID termination, their effectiveness, and five community-based, low-cost alternatives to improve reporting. The five alternatives identified capacity building and training of traditional and religious leaders, strengthening and resourcing of community-based child protection committees, community-based awareness campaigns utilising indigenous communication structures, technology-facilitated reporting tools adapted for rural contexts, and economic empowerment as a foundation for reporting.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.0 INTRODUCTION

The chapter looks at the research methodology which utilize a qualitative research approach specifically focusing on phenomenological methods, then looks at the population under study which consist of survivors of sexual abuse, community leaders, health and social workers as the targeted groups. It also explains the sample size used in the research, explaining the sampling methods in which the study adopted purposive sampling. It further explains the data collection methods such as in-depth interviews and focusses groups discussions which were used to collect data, whilst thematic analysis was used as the analysis method

3.1 RESEARCH APPROACH

This study utilized a qualitative research approach, specifically focusing on phenomenological methods. By conducting in-depth interviews and focus group discussions with community members, including survivors, local leaders, healthcare and social workers. The study explored experiences and perceptions related to Sexual abuse reporting in the context of funding withdrawal.

3.2 RESEARCH DESIGN

The study used a case study design, focusing on Ward 30, Gokwe South district previously supported by USAID. Research design is defined as a detailed plan outlining how the problem under study will be solved (Sileyewu, 2020). Data was collected through semi-structured and in-depth interviews with survivors, health and social workers, and focus group discussions with, community leaders. Case Study was used to collect data as information was collected from sources of which were important in finding sexual abuse reporting mechanisms employed post USAID termination funding and further recommendation on how best to

improve them using low cost and locally available resources to avoid over reliance on donor funding.

3.3 STUDY POPULATION

Target population is a specific subgroup possessing essential qualities or experiences relevant to the research, (Creswell (2017)). It also applies to all individuals and groups who have direct involvement in, are impacted by or are accountable for the sexual abuse reporting process. This consist of survivors of sexual abuse from 15 years and above, community leaders, health and social workers. The researcher chose survivors from at least the age of 15 because they are atleast mature enough, can observe and speak for themselves. These groups are necessary, because they are either directly involved in or impacted by sexual abuse reporting processes in the research community. Their experiences and perspectives are essential to understanding the barriers to disclosure and what kind of supports and interventions might help disclosure. Involving this group helped generate community-based and community-led solutions that will enable individuals and institutions to act against sexual abuse, especially where the formal reporting system has been undermined due to lack of funding.

3.4 SAMPLIG

Sampling is the process of selecting a subset of individuals or units from the larger target population to participate in a study (Scribbr,2019). It allows researchers to gather data that is representative of the broader population while being more practical and manageable than studying the entire group. The study employed purposive sampling to select participants with direct experience or knowledge of sexual abuse reporting in Ward 30. These include survivors of Sexual abuse, Community leaders, health and social workers.

3.4.1 SAMPLE SIZE

Refers to the number of participants included in the study. The study targeted a sample of 12 participants: four survivors of Sexual abuse, four Community leaders, one health worker and three social workers. Creswell and Poth (2018), suggest that qualitative studies typically use small samples to achieve depth. Hence it is crucial to use a small sample size which will help to draw conclusions on the alternatives to improve sexual abuse reporting.

3.4.2 SAMPLING TECHNIQUES

These are systematic strategies researchers use to select a subset of individuals from a broader population to generate data that supports valid and reliable conclusions, (Wangu 2024). The study utilized purposive sampling. This allowed the researcher to select participants who have direct experience and critical knowledge of the phenomenon.

3.4.3 PURPOSIVE SAMPLING

The study employed purposive sampling to select participants with direct experience or knowledge of sexual abuse reporting in Ward 30. Purposive sampling is where respondents are identified and selected based on their relevance and professionalism on the case being studied (Serrat, 2017). This sampling method was used to select four key informants who provided relevant information about the survivors of sexual abuse they have come in contact with them and know more about them. Etikan, Musa, and Alkassim (2016), highlight the utility of purposive sampling in accessing marginalized populations where random sampling may be impractical.

3.5 RESEARCH PROCEDURE

After obtaining a letter from the Bindura University of Science Education and permission from the department of social development. The researcher also wrote a letter to explain her research activities and how they were to be conducted in that area which allowed her to be given

permission to conduct research in an area of study. Participants were recruited through the department, local NGOs and local leadership. Informed consent was secured from each participant to ensure they understand the purpose, procedures, confidentiality, and voluntary nature of the study. Data was collected using in-depth interviews and focus group discussions conducted in ward 30 Gokwe South District. Interviews and focus group discussions were recorded with participants' permission to prepare for analysis. This process ensured systematic, ethical, and contextually relevant data collection, capturing survivors' experiences of Sexual abuse, their reporting mechanisms, and possible alternatives to improve abuse reporting.

3.6 DATA COLLECTION METHODS

Data collection methods refer to the tools of gathering and measuring information on targeted variables in an established system which then enables the researcher to come out with an outcome. The study will use in-depth- interviews and focus group discussions to gather rich, contextual data. Questions existing reporting mechanisms, their effectiveness and community-based alternatives to improve reporting, the research uncovered systemic gaps and locally viable solutions. Kvale and Brinkmann (2009,) advocate for in-depth interviews for their feasibility and depth . According, Krueger and Casey (2015) highlight focus groups as effective for exploring shared experiences, as they bring out shared experiences which are crucial in determining the prevalence of the phenomenon.

3.6.1 IN-DEPTH INTERVIEWS

In-depth interviews are a technique designed to elicit a vivid picture of the participant's perspective on the research topic and is usually conducted face to face and involves one interviewer and one participant (De Waal, 1995). The researcher used unstructured face to face interviews which were conducted with participants in the comfort of their homes and used the interview guides with open ended questions designed to allow them to express their own

perspectives in their own words. The Interviews lasted for 1 hour and 15 minutes and the researcher was taking down notes using a note book. Key informants such as the social workers and nurses were interviewed face to face in their place of work and used structured interview guides with structured questions, the interview took 45 minutes and the researcher was using a mobile phone to record and a note book for taking down notes.

3.6.2 FOCUS GROUPS

A focus group is an interview with a small group of individuals who share similar traits or past experiences in addition to having a comparable demographic. This research used focus groups with 4 community members as participants. The focus group was held at ward 30 for 30 minutes. Focus group guide with structured questions was used to ask the participants different questions. The researcher used a note book to take down notes.

3.7 DATA COLLECTION TOOLS

The researcher used 3 interview guides as research instruments, one interview guide for participants, key informants and the other for the researcher. The research guide comprised of unstructured questions for the survivors and structured questions for the key informants. A notebook was used for taking down notes and a mobile phone to voice record information. The researcher wrote down note taking and voice recorded the respondents (respondents who agreed to be voice recorded) from the information obtained in order not to be against the ethical considerations and to keep the confidentiality of the respondents, and to ensure the safety of the respondent. The researcher also had a focus group guide which was used during the focus group discussions. The focus group guide was used to ask questions for the group and the researcher had a note book to record the notes.

3.8 DATA PRESENTATION

The information presented in this study was displayed using tables and narrative analysis, to reflect upon reporting incidents of sexual abuse after the closure of USAID financing. The respondents' demographics will be collected on tables. Reporting mechanisms after funding withdrawal, how they are effective and alternative ways of improving their effectiveness will be illustrated thorough narrative analysis. Relevant trends and challenges in the 'post funding' environment will also be identified

3.9 DATA ANALYSIS

Data Analysis is the interpretation of data gathered through the use of analytical and logical reasoning to determine patterns, relationships or trends. The researcher used Thematic Analysis to analyze the qualitative data. Thematic analysis is the process of identifying patterns or themes within qualitative data, Braun and Clarke (2013). Interviews are to be analyzed with thematic content analysis, a method for analyzing face to face interview data. The analysis followed a process of familiarization, coding, generating themes, defining and naming themes and writing up propounded by Braun and Clarke (2009).

3.9.1 FAMILIARISATION

The first phase, where the researcher got to know the collected data, was comprehended using the words and thoughts of the interviewees. In addition, the researcher recorded the necessary comments that are of significance to the research.

3.9.2 CODING

The researcher generated codes from the information which was important to the objective of the study. The researcher obtained themes from these categories and went to the next stage.

3.9.3 GENERATING THEMES

In this phase, after the expressive data grouping, the researcher determined the related categories and connected them with the objective. The researcher developed themes and clarified underlying concepts. The researcher confirmed the relationship of themes to the study.

3.9.5 REPORT WRITING

This is the last step in which the researcher prepared a report of the findings. The report was written to assure the reader of the validity of the data.

3.10 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

These are factors that limit the scope of the study, its methodology, results, or generalizability, and that are outside of the researcher's control, such as constraints, weaknesses, or circumstances.

3.10.1 STIGMA AND FEAR

These are strong obstacles that stop many who have experienced sexual abuse from reporting it. Survivors worry that they will be socially judged negatively, blamed or ostracized from the community, and tend to internalize the shame of disclosure and participation in research studies. Stigma results in anticipated criticism or disbelief and this can greatly impact survivors' willingness to report to formal support services or authorities.

3.10.2 SELF-REPORTING

One of the most common ways to gather data is for self-reporting, which is influenced by survivors' own reports -- either in surveys or interviews -- and the data relies on survivors' willingness to share sensitive information. Emotional upset or fear of judgment of information or concerns of confidentiality may be present and result in response bias and incomplete

information being shared, which may lead to underreporting or avoidance of information by survivors.

3.11 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

They are the limits defined by the study's researcher to reduce and focus the study (Hassan, 2024). They create clarity and concentration.

3.11.1 GEOGRAPHIC SCOPE

The study covers only one Ward, namely Ward 30 in the Gokwe South district and does not mention any other ward or district. The study does not cover wards outside Gokwe South in order to keep the study focused and in-depth.

3.11.2 TIME FRAME

The research is specifically interested in the period after USAID ended its funding, and the data collection is only based on the period after USAID funding; before and during the funding period is not included. Such a delimitation enables the research to focus on the local effects of less external support, and to identify local alternatives to enhance reporting.

3.11.3 FOCUS

The focus of the research is on reporting systems, not on the overall causes or prevention of sexual abuse, thus providing for a more focused analysis of barriers and possible interventions in the current local reporting system.

3.12 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

These are a set of moral principles and guidelines for the planning and carrying out of research. They safeguard the participants, maintain integrity and instill trust in the research results.

3.12.1 VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION

Voluntary participation is when people volunteer to participate in research, rather than being coerced or unduly influenced to do so. SITUATIONS: In environments where services supported by USAID are being pulled out, participants may have an incentive to participate because of fear of losing access to remaining services. Optional participation and unrelatedness to service provision was emphasized. This is corroborated by Hennink, Hutter and Bailey (2020), who emphasizes that an important aspect of ensuring voluntariness is by establishing a safe space for participants to decline. In this study the researcher gained the consent of all participants and the legal guardians of the children who were willing to participate and also the children. The children were given the opportunity to opt out of the study if they wished.

3.12.2 INFORMED CONSENT

When the participant is asked to participate in the study after being told about the features of study, dangers and benefits of the study and they sign a form of agreement named the consent form to show that they have agreed to dangers, benefits or features of the study, therefore in this research the participants signed the consent form to show approval of the activities of the study. An understanding of the capacity to consent is a complex issue that must be taken into account when conducting ethical research with individuals who are survivors of abuse, as suggested by Morrow and Richards (1996). Informed consent is also not a one-time process, but an ongoing process, respecting the evolving autonomy of participants, as Alderson and Morrow (2020) further stress. Therefore, it is important to obtain the agreement of all concerned.

3.12.3 CONFIDENTIALITY AND ANONYMITY

Is when the researcher does not disclose important information to anyone while anonymity is when the researcher cannot identify a given response of a certain person therefore

confidentiality and anonymity protect the identity of a participant and would rather use pseudo names or numbers. Data was anonymized through the use of secure storage systems, and limited access to sensitive information to protect participants from stigma or retaliation. Kaiser (2009) states that the key factors in establishing trust and safety for the participants in qualitative research are maintaining confidentiality. In this research the participants were given pseudo names such as participant P1, KI1 and others.

3.12.4 AVOIDANCE OF HARM

Rubin and Babbie (2008) states that no subject participating in a study should be harmed at the hands of the researcher. Information in this ethical case may involve information that could jeopardize or embarrass their lives, careers, friendships or reputations. This can be backed up with the provision of the possibility to withdraw from the study in case of any harm. The aim of the study was to ascertain whether the children and/or their parents/guardians felt comfortable with their involvement in the study and the setting.

3.12.5 APPROVAL

Relevant academic institutions were the ones that granted clearance, so the study design, recruitment, and data handling are aligned with ethical standards. Israel and Hay (2006) said that the ethical review processes play a vital role in safeguarding vulnerable populations and ensuring public trust in research. In addition, Flick (2018) underscores the importance of obtaining ethical clearance not only for administrative reasons but to ensure methodological rigor and safety of the participants.

3.13 CHAPTER SUMMARY

Research approach, research designs, study population, sample size, sampling techniques, data collection methods, research instruments, research procedure and data analysis and presentation, and ethical considerations were discussed in this chapter.

CHAPTER 4: DATA PRESENTATION, INTERPRETATION, ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

4.0 INTRODUCTION

The objectives of this study were to identify sexual abuse reporting mechanisms in Ward 30, Gokwe South, following the termination of USAID funding; to assess the effectiveness of those reporting mechanisms; and to explore community-based, low-cost alternatives that can enhance sexual abuse reporting in the absence of external funding. Therefore, in this chapter, data collected through in-depth interviews and focus group discussions with participants in Ward 30, Gokwe South, are presented, analysed, and discussed based on these objectives. Empowerment Theory is used to make inferences from the findings. Data was collected from twelve participants including key informants comprising three social workers from the Department of Social Development, one nurse, 4 community members and 4 survivors. The researcher observed all ethical considerations during data collection so as to respect and protect the dignity and rights of all participants. Data analysis was conducted using thematic analysis, and the chapter further outlines the interpretation of data collected in relation to the three research objectives.

4.1 DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION OF PARTICIPANTS

Demographic information of participants who were interviewed during the course of this study is presented in tabular form below. The profile is vital since it assists in contextualising the phenomena under investigation and lends meaning to the perspectives shared by respondents.

4.1.1 DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION OF TOTAL PARTICIPANTS

TABLE 4.1.1: TOTAL PARTICIPANTS

Respondent Category	Intended	Actual	Total
Social Workers	3	3	3
Health Workers	1	1	1
Survivors of Sexual Abuse	4	4	4
Community Members	4	4	4

N = 12

The table above shows that there were twenty participants in total, comprising four community member respondents four key informants (3 social workers and one nurse) and four survivors. The four community members all participated as they had direct experience of sexual abuse reporting dynamics in Ward 30, Gokwe South, and were therefore targeted to provide accurate and contextually grounded information. Four key informants also participated, drawn from the Department of Social Development in Gokwe South and Hospital Victim Friendly Unit. The targeted number of community members, survivors and key informants was achieved in full.

4.1.2 GENDER AND AGE DISTRIBUTION OF SURVIVORS OF SEXUAL ABUSE

TABLE 4.1.2: GENDER AND AGE DISTRIBUTION OF SURVIVORS OF SEXUAL ABUSE.

Age Range (Years)	Total	Female	Male
15–25	2	2	0
26–35	1	1	0
36–50	1	1	0
Total	4	4	0

The table above shows the age and gender breakup of four sexually abused girls and women. Respondents ranged in age from 18-50 years. Two respondents aged 18-25 participated. One respondent came from the age group 26-35. One respondent was in the 36–50 age group. Overall, it shows the differential impact of sexual abuse on women and girls in the community, with only females being identified. This is consistent with findings from Chibango (2022) who found that women in Zimbabwean communities were the highest survivors of sexual abuse but least likely to formally report it, and with Masiyiwa (2020) who disclosed the high prevalence rates compared to formally reported cases, with the lowest cases of 9% in Zimbabwean communities.

4.2 DATA CODING AND ANALYSIS FRAMEWORK

The researcher used a thematic coding to identify themes that arose from the data obtained through interviews and focus group discussions with the participants. Codes were based on the goals of this study and concentrated on the mechanisms used to report sexual abuse, their

effectiveness after USAID termination, and community-based, low-cost alternatives to enhance sexual abuse reporting in Ward 30. The Empowerment Theory by Zimmerman (1995) and other literature were used to analyse and interpret the data and make conclusions.

4.3 SEXUAL ABUSE REPORTING MECHANISMS IN WARD 30, GOKWE SOUTH, POST-USAID TERMINATION

The results indicated that there were four types of sexual abuse reporting mechanism in operation in Ward 30, Gokwe South, after the end of USAID funding: Formal government institutions (Department of Social Development and Victim Friendly Units); Community Based Child Protection Committees; Traditional and religious authority structures as informal reporting mechanism and Cell phone and SMS-based reporting. These mechanisms are discussed in detail below.

4.3.1 FORMAL GOVERNMENT INSTITUTIONS

The community members in Ward 30 noted that the current formal government institutions for reporting – the Department of Social Development (DSD) and the Victim Friendly System (VFS), remained the main platforms available after the end of USAID funding. They appeared to be the lifeline of the formal child protection and sexual abuse reporting system in the post-USAID environment, but participants continually emphasized that these institutions were severely limited in terms of resources, accessibility, and capacity to operate due to lack of donor support.

4.3.1.1 DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

The Department of Social Development was determined to be the most well-known formal structure for reporting sexual abuse in Ward 30. The Department's mandate to receive, evaluate and act on social protection concerns put it in the spotlight as the main source of referral point for the community members who want a formal intervention. Participants also found that

although there was awareness of the Department, there was often a poor experience of using it as a reporting mechanism, with many reporting that the response times were too long, there was little follow-up and often the Department lacked the capacity to reach out into the more remote areas of Ward 30 due to transport and fuel challenges.

P1 stated:

"Tinoziva Social Welfare, ndiko kwatinoendesa nyaya zhinji dzechibharo asi kufamba kusvika ikoko hakusi nyore, dzimwe dzenguva tinovataurira nyaya nema foni asi zvinotora nguva kuti vafambire nyay ayacho, isu hatina mari yekubhadhara bhazi uye kunyange ukasvika, havana mota yekuuya nayo kuzoona nyaya yako kumba,"

(We know the Social Development office but travelling there is not easy, we do not have money for bus fare and even when they get there, they do not have a vehicle to come.)

This was corroborated by P3 saying:

"Ndakaendesa nyaya kumahofisi eSocial Development asi vakandiudza kuti vaizouya asi havana kuuya. Takamirira kwemavhiki maviri uye mwana wacho akanga achiri mumusha mumwe chete nekapara mhosva, "

(I went to the Social Development offices, and they told me they would be coming, but they never came, and we waited for 2 weeks and the child remained in the same home as the perpetrator.)

KI 1 agreed:

"Previously there were programmes funded by USAID where we could go out to the communities regularly, follow up with reported cases and work with village health workers and community leaders as part of a coordinated response, but now we are reactive and not

proactive. We wait for people to come to us and even then, our capacity to respond in the field is very limited because we simply do not have the resources to move."

The data showed an explicit and uniform pattern from the participants that the Department of Social Development, despite having a structure and institutional recognition, functions in a highly resource-constrained setting after the USAID. USAID funding had been used to offset the transport, case management capacity, and community outreach functions of the Department, which were no longer available upon the termination of USAID funding.

This is in line with Maodzwa and Chinyowa (2021) who reported that the lack of adequate funding in social welfare departments in rural Zimbabwe is causing acute shortage of services, especially in geographically distant areas. Moreover, Muzvidziwa (2020), highlighted that the fragile nature of Zimbabwe's child protection system, which relies on donor funding made it most vulnerable at the community level when donors stopped funding the system. The Government of Zimbabwe needs to strengthen domestic funding for the Department of Social Development including transport, communication and case management support to the personnel in districts like Gokwe South in order to uphold its statutory mandate of being a functional and responsive reporting mechanism.

3.1.2 THE VICTIM FRIENDLY SYSTE

The Victim Friendly System was also identified as one of the formal government reporting systems available in Ward 30. The system has a set of specially created units within police stations and hospitals where the survivors of sexual abuse can report crime in a safe, supportive and non-intimidating environment. Participants recognised that the Victim Friendly System is an important part of the reporting process to ensure that survivors, in particular women and children, are treated sensitively, with dignity and confidentiality. The Victim Friendly System

was seen as being more accessible than traditional police organizations and more sensitive towards the emotional and psychological needs of victims.

P2 explained:

"Ndakanzwa nezvekamuri yeVictim Friendly iri kupolice nekuchipatara. Ndiko kwatinotaura mhosva dzinenge dzaitika votipa rubatsiro runoenderana nezvatinenge tichida kana nemhosva inenge yaparwa."

(I got the information about the Victim Friendly system at the police and at the hospital, we report our cases and they provide support suitable to the case.)

KI 3 acknowledged:

"The Victim Friendly Unit is a good mechanism to handle cases, it helps to protect the safety of the survivors, manage the case and provides a more compassionate setting for the survivors to access support and/or referrals."

The results showed that the Victim Friendly System has had a positive effect on the handling of sexual abuse cases, as it has led to a more survivor-centred approach to reporting. It was observed by the participants that the availability of trained police officers and dedicated areas in police stations reduces the fear and intimations of the survivors and thus promotes reporting. Further, the system was seen as effective in providing a connection to the necessary services including medical, counselling, and legal. Some officers were also praised for their professionalism and sensitivity in the Victim Friendly Units, enabling victims to feel listened to and supported during the reporting process.

This aligns with what Hove and Chenaimoyo (2022) observed that Victim Friendly Units in Zimbabwe are important because they are able to deliver trauma-informed support and enhance the journey of survivors through formal reporting processes. In the same vein, Ncube (2021)

noted that survivor-friendly reporting mechanisms help strengthen trust in formal institutions and communities are more likely to report cases of sexual abuse. This also allows for this to align with Empowerment Theory (Gutierrez, 1994), which focuses on restoring agency, protection and support to vulnerable people through systems. The Victim Friendly System builds survivors' confidence to pursue justice and access vital services after abuse, by taking a survivor-centred approach.

4.3.2 COMMUNITY BASED CHILD PROTECTION COMMITTEES (CPCS)

Participants identified community-based child protection committees (CPCs) as a reporting mechanism that was important during USAID funding, but was currently functioning in a drastically reduced capacity after the programme's closure. Participants validated the presence and willingness of CPC volunteers in Ward 30; however, they indicated that CPCs were operating without operational resource, creating challenges for them to identify, receive and formally escalate reports of sexual abuse.

P3's characterization of the situation of CPCs is as follows:

"Vatariri vechild protection committee vari munzvimbo yedu ndivo vatinotaurira mhosva dzinenge dzaitika asi havana zvinhu zvekushanda nazvo. Vanoziva nyaya dzinofamba asi havagone kudziendesa mberi nekuti, hakuna mari yekufambisa kuti nyaya dzienderere mberi."

(Those who serve on the child protection committee in our community are eager to help; however, they do not have anything to work with, and know of cases but are not able to take them further as they are not provided with a budget for transport to the police.)

KI 1 built on the structural aspects of this constraint, by directly connecting it to the withdrawal of the coordination support financed by USAID:

"When the NGOs were operating, the CPCs were the backbone of our community protection work, they had training, communication tools and monthly coordination meetings with the department – all of this ceased with the end of the funding. Now they are committed volunteers who are doing a good job but unable to do anything about their good intentions."

The findings show that the child protection volunteers in Gokwe are under significant logistical constraints such as resource constraints, geographic coverage constraints that required them to stretch themselves to cover long distances in one ward. These already difficult operating conditions have worsened with the end of USAID funding. UNICEF Zimbabwe (2022), showed that meaningful protection outcomes could be achieved when community childcare workers are connected to district-level, case management officers, who have coordination support and capacity, which is exactly what has been lost in Ward 30 due to programme closures.

4.3.3 RELIGIOUS AND TRADITIONAL AUTHORITY STRUCTURES AS INFORMAL REPORTING CHANNELS

Participants mentioned another type of reporting mechanism in Ward 30 that has been used consistently after the withdrawal of the USAID funded programmes, namely religious and traditional authority structures, including church leaders, pastors, village headmen, and community elders. Participants reported a transition as NGO facilitated referral systems broke down; community members were identifying and disclosing to these informal authority figures as the most readily available trusted adults.

P1 explained this adaptive turn to informal structures as follows:

"Dzimwe dzenguva tinokundikana kuenda kupolisi kana kusocial welfare nekuti kure, saizvozvo tinoenda kamasabhuku kana vakuru vekerere votibatsira kuendesa nyaya dzedu mberi."

(It is difficult to send to the police or the social welfare department as it is very far and we always depend upon the village head, the village elder is nearby and knows all the families, this is another way we have to send cases.)

In a similar pattern of first disclosure, P7 spoke of the role of church leaders and community leaders:

"Ndakaenda kumapastor mushure mekunge ndabatwa chibharo. Vakanditeerera uye vakandiudza kuti ndiende kuclinic iripedyo, ivo vachiendesa nyaya yangu kumapurisa."

("I went to the pastor after this happened, he heard me and told me to go to the nearest clinic, while he reported my case to the police.")

KI 4 confirmed, saying that:

"In Ward 30, the village head and the pastor are now the first institutions to whom survivors turn for help, and although they are trusted and geographically accessible, many are not trained in survivor-centred approaches, and many cases are being resolved through customary approaches and not through formal reporting processes."

The results clearly show that the religious and traditional authority can serve as a useful avenue for reporting of sexual abuse. This aligns with Mapiko and Chinyoka (2017), who reported that in rural communities in Zimbabwe, the informal community networks such as religious leaders and trusted elders are often the first to disclose, especially if the formal networks are not seen to be available. Additionally, Muridzo (2024) analyzed court files from courts in Harare to show that faith and traditional institutions are still very much entrenched in the initial handling of sexual abuse disclosures at the community level through the Social Services. However, Obong'o (2020) established that the fear of re-victimisation and retaliation by the perpetrator was one of the greatest impediments to disclosure even within the informal community spheres

like traditional and religious leaders, suggesting that relying on these informal channels comes with significant risk of further victimisation as opposed to facilitating formal reports.

4.3.4 CELL PHONE AND SMS-BASED REPORTING

In the post-USAID context, participants disclosed that cell phone and SMS reporting did exist in Ward 30, and that it was based on the fact that community members could send reports of sexual abuse via a text message or a phone call and the cost to the community was relatively low. Throughout the process participants, however, emphasized that it was seriously hampered by inconsistencies in network coverage and the lack of response from reporting structures to cases caused by lack of resources and funds.

P2 stated:

“Tinogona kutumira mameseji ezvinenge zvzitika asi network inogona kuva dambukidzo meseji yononoka kusvika, Uye kunyange ukatumira shoko, vanogona kunonoka kuuya kana kusatouya zvachose.”

("We can report cases by sending messages or phone calls but sometimes network can be a challenge leading to messages taking time to be sent, and even if you send the message, they take long to respond or sometimes they don't even come at all.")

P8 further added:

“Foni inogona kushanda asi kana iwe watumira shoko asi vanotora nguva yakareba kuti vauye nekuda kwekuti vange vachiti hatina mota yekuti tishandise kana kuti Hapana mari yekudira mafuta ekufambisa.”

("The phone is capable of functioning but when no one calls back and you send another message, you give up; there isn't any money for them to come and attend to your case.)

KI 1 also assisted with observing:

"The phones are there and people have them, but the system behind the phone is broken because if a report comes in, we don't always have the transport, the fuel or the personnel to respond. The funding that used to support rapid response to reported cases has reduced, and we are doing what we can with very little."

The data showed a clear trend among the respondents on the one hand that cell phone and SMS-based reporting is a cheap and accessible mechanism, but on the other hand, that there are infrastructural and institutional limitations that seriously limit the practical use of the system in Ward 30. Communication through messaging and calls to targeted community members has not been consistent in remote areas of the ward, and because of the breakdown of outreach by USAID, most community members lack adequate knowledge of available reporting channels. More importantly, even if reports are made, the lack of financial and material resources in receiving structures leads to poor or lacking follow-up, making the mechanism unreliable.

Phone and SMS based reporting under allowing conditions can be one of the most effective reporting mechanisms due to its accessibility and low cost. Mobile penetration was at around 96% of the adult population nationally (POTRAZ 2023) and the evidence from Ward 30 indicated that mobile device accessibility does not translate to an effective reporting mechanism. Therefore, funding priorities need to be given to enhancing the awareness and the response capacity of institutions involved in SMS and phone-based reporting. This involves improving community education outreach to ensure the community is aware of channels available, enhancing network infrastructure in less-resourced areas, and properly resourcing social welfare and child protection systems to ensure timely, funded and meaningful response to reports received through this channel.

4.4 EFFECTIVENESS OF SEXUAL ABUSE REPORTING MECHANISMS IN WARD 30, GOKWE SOUTH

Findings revealed that the implementation of all four mechanisms for reporting sexual abuse was highly restricted after the USAID support was withdrawn, with structural, geographic, financial, and cultural barriers to each. To answer the second objective, participants were asked to consider the effectiveness of these mechanisms in responding to the needs of the survivors since the end of USAID funding. The results are discussed below.

4.4.1 FORMAL GOVERNMENT INSTITUTIONS

Participants indicated that formal government structures, such as the Department of Social Development, Victim Friendly Units, police and the hospital were important structures to deal with sexual abuse in Ward 30. But participants noted that their influence has notably diminished since USAID funding was discontinued. While these institutions remain legally and structurally intact, the respondents said that these units' capacity to effectively respond to survivors has been diminished by distance, lack of transportation, and resource limitations.

4.4.1.1 DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

The Department of Social Development was seen as one of the important institutions in charge of child protection, helping survivors, and coordinating welfare services. The department was acknowledged for their legal responsibility for sexual abuse cases and their connections to relevant services. However, participants reported that the department was losing its effectiveness greatly since the funding of USAID was withdrawn, especially as NGO-backed referral systems and outreach programmes have been dismantled.

A key informant from the Department of Social Development clarified that in the past, NGO partners have been instrumental in identifying survivors, referral and accompanying victims to

access services. Without them, there was a significant gap in a reporting chain, and many cases went unreported even though abuse continued to be prevalent.

KI 1 stated:

“Formal institutions are operating, but they are not connecting with Ward 30 survivors – the NGO partners, who identified cases, accompanied survivors, and followed up on referrals have been lost, and that is not an issue of whether there is an abuse, it's a matter of the infrastructure that connects the survivors to services has been lost.”

This shows that it is institutionally, the Department of Social Development still exists, however, the outreach and responsiveness have been compromised due to the removal of external support systems which were able to augment service delivery in remote communities.

4.4.1.2 POLICE VICTIM FRIENDLY UNITS

Participants agreed that Victim Friendly Units continue to be a valuable means of reporting as they offer a legal and recognised avenue for reporting sexual abuse. The units were considered favourable in terms of the survivor-centred approach; they are specifically designed to work with cases sensitively and in a supportive way. Participants indicated, however, that the inaccessibility of rural communities limited the effectiveness of Victim Friendly Units in Ward 30. Survivors faced difficulties in accessing police stations, especially where they were located far from their homes, without the ability to access transport services that had been supported before the conflict by USAID-funded programmes. Participants also voiced concern that even if survivors made it to the units, at times, support was not provided because there was a lack of resources, such as fuel and vehicles to enable follow-up investigations and outreach services.

P8 explained:

"Dambudziko ratinaro nderekuti nzvimbo yePolice Victim Friendly Unit irikure nekwatinogara rinova iro dambudziko rinogonesa kuti mhosva dzakawanda dziendeswe mberi."

("The difficulty is that the Victor Friendly Units are located far, far away, so we do not get to them; sometimes even if we go there, we are not assisted because they say they do not have resources like fuel and vehicles to assist.")

The results indicated that the police Victim Friendly Units are still of structural significance in the fight against sexual abuse, but the accessibility and lack of resources are a problem in the rural areas like Ward 30.

4.4.1.3 HOSPITAL VICTIM FRIENDLY UNITS

The hospital victim friendly unit was also identified as formal institutions that play a role in the sexual abuse case, especially in providing medical examination, treatment, counselling and referral. Health facilities were seen as important as they play a vital role in giving prompt medical aid to survivors and in providing evidence for the legal process. But, participants said the effectiveness of health institutions was also impacted by resource constraints and access problems. Some survivors felt that the distance to hospital and clinic was too far to walk and also the transport fare to reach the hospital or clinic was expensive. Furthermore, insufficient medical resources and poor access to outreach services meant that health facilities were not able to meet the needs of the survivors adequately.

A Nurse KI 2 noted:

"As health workers, we continue to conduct health examinations, health care, counselling and referrals to survivors of sexual abuse, but the main challenge is that survivors do not come on time or at all since health facilities are far from communities and transport costs are too high, as well as medical shortages and limited resources for outreach services reducing our response capacity to remote areas such as Ward 30."

Overall, the results suggest that while formal government institutions still play a crucial role in the management of sexual abuse cases in Ward 30, this role is significantly impaired by structural and logistical challenges after the withdrawal of USAID funding. This is in line with the findings by Musiwa (2018) that there is a lack of resources and challenges in implementing the Victim Friendly System in rural Zimbabwe that often make the system available but not accessible. Likewise, Mutasa (2022) posited that donor interventions' support for empowerment structures, which linked survivors to institutional services and reporting mechanisms, had been withdrawn, leading to their collapse. However, from the lens of Empowerment Theory created by Marc Zimmerman (1995), geographically or financially remote institutions do not serve the function of Empowerment Theory as it relates to a role of interactional empowerment that helps survivors to interact effectively with the reporting system. This means that formal structures are still there, though not in practice as perceived by the participants, in Ward 30 they have a limited ability to support victims of sexual abuse.

4.4.2 COMMUNITY-BASED CHILD PROTECTION COMMITTEE (CPC).

Participants rated community-based child protection committees as the mechanism with the highest potential for effectiveness in Ward 30, appreciating that they are very effective under the current circumstances, but they are significantly hampered by the lack of resources and logistics following USAID programme closures. The value of the CPC volunteers was identified and their practical boundaries explained by participants who had interacted with them.

P2 stated:

“Vatariri vemusha vanoziva mhuri dzese uye vanogona kutiziva kana chimhu chikaitika. Asi nyaya dzinogumira mumusha chete. Havana mafambiro ekuendesaa nyaya kupolisi nenyaya yekufambisa zvininetsa.”

(“cases get 'stalled' in the community, the community volunteers know every family and can tell when something has happened, but they have no way to take cases further to the police and services beyond.”)

KI 4 further elaborated:

“When USAID funded NGOs left, CPCs were no longer having monthly coordination meetings with us, no referral protocols, no named contact at formal end of referral chain. When a CPC identifies a referral, she has no transport to get the survivor to the formal end of the referral chain, and no assurance anyone is there to receive her referral.”

This result is in line with the CPC analysis conducted in Chapter 2. In a study, Meinck (2017) showed that communities with trained child protection committees had much higher disclosure rates and formal referral rates than communities without child protection committees that were similar in other respects. Shaw et al. (2021) in particular, identified that community-based approaches in Zimbabwe contributed to statistically significant increases in knowledge and willingness to report but needed continued facilitation and follow-up support to foster lasting behaviour change, the very support that has been lost in Ward 30 due to USAID programme closures. UNICEF Zimbabwe (2022) also illustrated the need for effective implementation of CPCs to be critically dependent on linkage with case management officers (CMOs) with coordination capacity at district level and that loss of coordination infrastructure is a key constraint to CPC effectiveness at the district level in Ward 30.

4.4.3 RELIGIOUS AND TRADITIONAL AUTHORITY STRUCTURES

The most culturally accessible and least effective authority structures identified were those of religious and traditional leaders. They were always available, and not subject to the funding cycles, because they were church leaders and village heads who were always present and trusted in Ward 30, even when USAID was coming and going. But the most common response from survivors if they revealed to these informal systems was customary resolution such as mediation, apology or payment of compensation – not formal reporting to the police or social services.

P1 described clearly:

“Nyaya yedu yakaendeswa kunaSabhuku. Vakataura nevabereki vemurume vakati murume anofanira kukumbira ruregerero, vakaita seizvozvo nyaya inenge yaperera. Asi murume uyu achiri mumusha. Hapana akaendeswa kupolisi.”

(“Our case was referred to the village chief. They discussed the case with the family of this man and told him that he should apologize. They said that the case was closed. But this man still lives in this community and nobody was handed over to the police.”)

KI 4 confirmed this trend of customary resolution had grown over the last few years, as there were no longer NGO partners to stimulate formal referral:

“Traditional leaders and pastors are not required to report cases to police; in fact, most do not report cases when survivors do turn to them, the result is almost always reconciliation or compensation within the family, but if the NGOs were present, they would follow up, and sometimes open formal reports; however, now that this does not happen, cases are closed within the family.”

This is consistent with Muridzo (2024) which offers direct qualitative evidence that cultural myths, religious beliefs and customary practices are actively involved in the informal management of sexual abuse cases, for example, paying a fine to the family of the victim in the traditional courts “dare” is an alternative to criminal prosecution. Such a customary resolution process normalises sexual violence and contributes to a non-accountability of those who commit it. In Zimbabwe, fear of re-victimisation, such as fear of being blamed, shamed, doubted or facing family disruption was one of the main reasons survivors were not disclosing, even to trusted community figures, highlighting that traditional and religious means are only effective as formal reporting channels if the community leaders are specifically trained to respond without judgment and to consistently refer disclosures into formal channels (Obong’o et al., 2020).

4.4.4 CELL PHONE AND SMS BASED REPORTING

Participants discussed some new tools for reporting that might help increase the reporting of sexual abuse cases in Ward 30, including cell phone calls and SMS-based reporting, where if a survivor does not have the ability to physically report to formal institutions like police stations, hospital, or Social Development offices, these could be an alternative. Participants described how cellphone communication gave the survivor a chance to get help, advice and information without making themselves immediately public in the community, and to report abuse confidentially. This reporting mechanism was deemed particularly significant in rural areas where it is far from communities and the formal institutions are located.

Participants also reported that case reporting increased in visibility after the implementation of USAID funded programmes that facilitated case reporting through community awareness campaigns which previously had educated residents on available communication channels for reporting abuse, using cellphones and SMS. However, participants reported that its effectiveness is severely impacted by network challenges, and poor response, affecting case.

P8 explained:

“Dzimwe nguva kushandisa nharembosha zvinobatsira nekuti munhu anogona kutaura nyaya yake asingafambi rwendo rurefu. Asi dambudziko nderekuti vamwe havana mafoni, network inonetsa, uye dzimwe nguva munhu anongopiwa mazano asi asingabatsirwe kusvika pakuwana rubatsiro rwacho.”

(“This sometimes helps because a person can describe what has happened to them, without having to travel a long distance, but some people do not have cell phones, network connections are not good, and sometimes a person receives advice and not actual assistance.”)

The results showed that there is some level of effectiveness to cell phone and SMS based reporting in order to enable initial disclosure of sexual abuse cases. Participants reported that cell phone calls or texting tended to be more comfortable ways for survivors to share sensitive experiences, since it decreased the fear, embarrassment and community exposure. In some instances, cell phone contact helped survivors to get information about where they can seek medical care, counselling, or legal assistance. Participants also recognized that phone-based communication can save time and transportation costs that are related to travelling to reporting institutions.

However, the participants stressed that there were still several structural issues in Ward 30 which severely constrained the effectiveness of the cell phone and SMS based reporting. Problems with mobile network coverage in certain villages made communication unreliable, and many vulnerable survivors were unable to use this method due to a lack of access to a personal cell phone. Some participants also commented on limitations of privacy and confidentiality, particularly regarding the sharing of phones with family members. Low availability of charging services, high airtime prices and the lack of power in rural areas further limited the feasibility of community members using the cell phone to report.

Participants also pointed out that there were frequently no effective follow-up mechanisms in place for the cell phone and SMS-based reporting. While survivors could report abuse via phone, they would still have required access to hospital, police station or social welfare offices to receive full support. Therefore, mobile phone communication cannot be relied upon to provide effective case management or protection for survivors.

A social worker K1 1 commented:

“Although cellphone communication is one of the best ways to help survivors report cases quickly and confidentially, especially in areas where formal institutions are far away, it is ineffective without robust follow-up services on the ground – many survivors in Ward 30 are still not able to access medical treatment, police services or counselling due to transport issues or limited outreach capacity.”

KI 3 further noted:

“the challenge is not simply receiving the report via a phone or SMS, but connecting the survivor to real-life services afterwards: without transport, outreach resources and community follow-up systems, the result of phone reporting is limited protection for the survivor”.

The results indicate that cellphone and SMS-based reporting has significant potential for contributing to greater accessibility and confidentiality of sexual abuse reporting in remote rural communities. Their effectiveness is limited, however, by technological, economic and infrastructural challenges, which have been exacerbated by the exit of USAID-supported programmes. The results align with Chibango (2022) who noted that there was a lack of awareness and utilisation of technology-based reporting in most rural areas in Zimbabwe attributed to lack of sensitisation and the network infrastructure. Therefore, SMS and cellphone-based reporting systems work best when coupled with robust referral systems and readily available follow up supports.

Cellphone and SMS reporting services, from the standpoint of Empowerment Theory (Zimmerman, 1995), can help to empower survivors by giving them a safer and more confiding way to report abuse. But empowerment is limited if survivors can't access the institutional support and protection, they need after disclosure. Therefore, it is noted that cellphone and SMS reporting can be an effective communication channel but its usage is reliant on having effective and accessible support systems.

4.5 COMMUNITY-BASED, LOW-COST ALTERNATIVES TO IMPROVE SEXUAL ABUSE REPORTING IN WARD 30, GOKWE SOUTH

Findings indicated that five types of cost-effective, community-based alternatives could provide an effective way to improve reporting of sexual abuse in Ward 30 without the need for external USAID funding. The researcher approached this third objective by asking the key informants and members of the community who responded to the questionnaires about such alternatives. These are: Training and empowerment of Faith based and Traditional Leaders; Strengthening and Resourcing of Community Based Child Protection Committees; Community Based Awareness Campaigns Utilising Indigenous Communication Structures; and Economic empowerment as a basis for reporting. These will be discussed in detail later.

4.5.1 CAPACITY BUILDING AND TRAINING OF TRADITIONAL AND RELIGIOUS LEADERS

Key informants and community members identified the training and capacity building of traditional and religious leaders as the most feasible community-based alternative to improve sexual abuse reporting in Ward 30. Participants agreed that training the village headmen, chiefs, pastors, and church leaders in ways that were more survivor centred and in making appropriate referrals was a high impact and low cost intervention.

KI 1 stated:

“They are the traditional and religious leaders that are already in the community and people believe in them; what they need is training, how to do disclosures properly, how not to re-traumatise survivors, how to refer cases to us. If we train them, they will be a resource, not a risk.”

P6 agreed this is the picture, and that there was no doubt that local leaders were willing to get involved:

“Our headman tries to help, he says if a problem comes to him, he tries to help, but he says that he doesn't always know how and doesn't always know who to call, he says this if he had training and our numbers he would know, but he cannot.”

This is in line with the findings of Mapiko and Chinyoka (2017), that traditional leadership structures in rural Zimbabwe had the social capital and community trust needed if they were to be trained on how to respond effectively to sexual abuse disclosures as a first point of call, using survivor-centred practice and referral. Muridzo (2024) also suggested that traditional and religious leaders should be involved in formal referral systems as a sustainable community-based approach to enhance reporting in rural areas lacking resources. This training of traditional and religious leaders can be viewed in a community-based empowerment approach, as an empowerment intervention in creating the capacity to support survivors and to break the silence surrounding sexual abuse from an Empowerment Theory perspective. Zimmerman (1995) conceptualizes the empowerment at the community level as the building up of community resources and competencies that help the community solve common problems. Capacity-building investments in the ability of community to appropriately respond to sexual abuse disclosures are an example of this.

4.5.2 STRENGTHENING AND RESOURCING OF COMMUNITY BASED CHILD PROTECTION COMMITTEES

Key alternative mechanisms cited by participants across the board were strengthening and resourcing community-based child protection committees as an alternative to improve sexual abuse reporting in Ward 30. Participants were convinced that even relatively small investments in resources could have a significant impact on improving the effectiveness of CPC volunteers, who were already in place and are motivated, and know about community level cases. Participants suggested the need for basic transport support (cycles/ fuel), monthly coordination meetings with the Department of Social Development and communication tools (communication with basic mobile phones and airtime).

KI 3 stated:

“If we could give the CPCs just basic transport allowances, phone airtime and have monthly meetings, they could do so much more”.

P5 explained the possible consequences of low level resourcing:

“Having bicycles would make a difference to the CPC volunteers who can access areas that otherwise have no transport connection, many of the areas where cases occur are far from the road.”

Meanwhile, these findings align with UNICEF Zimbabwe (2022), which showed that community childcare workers and CPC volunteers can achieve impactful protection outcomes with basic logistical support and access to CPCs with district-level coordination capacity. Similarly, Muridzo and Malianga (2015) concluded that greater logistical and coordination support for CPC volunteers was positively correlated with improved effectiveness and that even small investments in transportation and communication could make a huge difference in increasing rates of case identification and referral. Resourcing CPC volunteers, therefore, is an

investment in the structural conditions of community level empowerment, from an Empowerment Theory perspective. Lee (2001) states that empowerment practice needs to concern itself with the material and organisational factors which facilitate people and communities to take action on their knowledge and commitment. Structural empowerment support of this sort involves equipping CPC volunteers with the tools they have to implement their current knowledge.

4.5.3 COMMUNITY AWARENESS CAMPAIGNS WITH INDIGENOUS COMMUNICATION SYSTEMS

The participants highlighted a need for community-based awareness campaigns as a vital alternative method of restoring knowledge of sexual abuse reporting avenues in Ward 30. Most importantly, the participants noted that effective awareness campaigns did not have to follow costly and outside-the-box models. Instead, they suggested that the indigenous communication mechanisms such as community meetings, church gatherings, school assemblies and traditional ceremonies should be used for low cost awareness creation.

P3 stated:

“In our community, everyone goes when there's a dare or a community meeting, and that's where things like that are announced and discussed, and if social welfare workers came to these meetings, and explained where and how to report, many more people would know.”

This was supported by KI 4, which found that it was cost-effective and culturally relevant:

“We don't need a big campaign, we need for someone from our office to be at the community meetings already taking place and to use the opportunity to share information about reporting. Churches are very receptive to these messages and cost is minimal and reach is good.”

These results are consistent with the larger literature of community based behaviour change communication in resource poor environments. Chirwa and Nyamukapa (2019) maintained that local, and culturally appropriate communication approaches using local community institutions were far more effective in reaching rural people in Zimbabwe compared to external awareness campaigns. So incorporating sexual abuse awareness into existing community events and platforms, like church services or community gatherings, had a significant impact on raising community awareness of reporting options at little to no cost. Community-based awareness programmes that are based on indigenous structures are congruent with the principle of empowerment in community development: build on existing strengths and available resources in the community. Solomon (1976) stressed that effective empowerment practice is about uncovering and leveraging the internal resources of communities not replacing them with external interventions. The campaigns thus have been most effective through existing community structures, and practically and theoretically congruent with an approach of empowerment to the practice of social work.

4.5.4 TECHNOLOGY-FACILITATED REPORTING TOOLS ADAPTED FOR RURAL CONTEXTS

Some participants, especially younger age groups, expressed interest in the potential for technology-based reporting solutions, as mobile phone ownership was fairly high in Ward 30 despite poor internet coverage. Participants made recommendations to create a straightforward

and anonymous reporting system that is easy to access via basic cell phone technology, coupled with a community awareness campaign to create awareness of the tool.

P1 proposed:

"If there was a free USSD number, people could send a message on without money, people could be helped. But you need to know the number and know that someone will respond. Many have phones, many don't have data. If there was a free USSD number, people could send a message on without money, people could be helped. But you need to know the number and know that someone will respond."

KI 1 supported:

"It is a system that uses USSD technology and operates on basic feature phones, without internet connectivity, so it could work in if it is promoted through community meetings, schools, and churches. But the technology is only the first step: you also need trained people on the receiving end who are able to acknowledge reports and generate a formal response. Without back-end capacity, the tool reports into a void."

The USSD-based reporting model, that provides a direct link between the survivors and trained responders, and survivor support referral pathways, is most suitable for rural Zimbabwe, as described by the participants in this study. Ndawana and Chisambiro (2024) reported on the empowerment potential of technology tools in the context of Zimbabwe where women and girls are at risk of social condemnation when disclosing abuse face-to-face and where digital platforms have started to offer space for disclosure that was previously unfeasible. Fry (2022) has provided an empirical confirmation that SMS based reporting systems in sub-Saharan Africa resulted in disclosure rates that were nearly 40% higher than in regions that do not have SMS based reporting systems. Powell (2018) also emphasized the importance of mobile reporting platforms and how they increase anonymity and accessibility, especially for

adolescent survivors who might be hesitant to disclose face-to-face, which is applicable to the adolescent survivors in Ward 30.

4.5.5 ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT AS A BASE FOR REPORTING

An alternative that was considered both fundamental but often overlooked by participants and key informants was economic empowerment, which directly challenged what many felt was the biggest, most entrenched, and most powerful structural obstacle to reporting in Ward 30: the economic dependency of survivors on perpetrators, which could make formal reporting financially threatening and thus irrational from a material survival point of view.

P7's vivid description of this barrier:

"Mukadzi akabatwa chibharo nemurume anogona kureva kunani kana murume ariye anopa mwana chikafu, anobhadhara mari yevana yedzidzo, anobhadhara. Kana akamumhangarira unorasikirwa nezvese izvozvo."

"Where will the abused woman find a place to turn if the man who is beating her is the one who brings the children food, pays their school fees, provides for the home? If you report him, you lose all of that, which is why it's difficult to report when your kids will suffer for it."

KI 1

"The Bethany Project in Zimbabwe demonstrated this well, when women had their own income and were in a saving group, they were far less afraid to report as they knew they could survive without the man, Ward 30 needs this model, a saving group and micro-enterprise supported by the Ministry of Women Affairs and not requiring external monies from donors."

The findings of Musemwa and Gomo (2020), which confirmed that material dependency is a core issue of formal reporting as a structural issue, were documented in the economic costs of

reporting sexual violence in rural Zimbabwe. Sustainable gender-based violence interventions need to include economic empowerment, savings groups and vocational training, and income generation projects, and not rely on providing legal and psychosocial support in isolation from the economic realities of whether reporting is materially survivable. The Bethany Project's Pamumvuri Forums documented direct Zimbabwean evidence that a combination of economic empowerment and awareness of rights led to measurable increases in self-esteem and confidence, components of intrapersonal empowerment which enabled disclosure and reporting that participants said they would not have done otherwise. In the specifically Zimbabwean context, Chakrabarti et al. (2020) also found evidence that a cash-plus approach decreased youth exposure to physical violence, which means that economic empowerment interventions have direct and measurable impact on violence outcomes in this context.

4.6 DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The study was designed to focus on finding alternative solutions to enhance sexual abuse reporting in Ward 30, Gokwe South since the end of USAID funding. The results of the research will be discussed in this section with regards to the literature studied in Chapter 2 and the analytical framework of Empowerment Theory as developed by Zimmerman (1995). The discussion is organised around the three research objectives.

4.6.1 EMPOWERMENT THEORY

The results confirmed that Empowerment theory was very appropriate as the guiding analytical framework for this study. According to Zimmerman (1995), empowerment is a process whereby people, groups and organizations increase control over the decisions and actions that impact their lives. The theory was applied to the study, allowing the researcher to understand that the USAID funding withdrawal was not just a loss of services, but a structural

disempowerment event, one that systematically deprived sexual abuse survivors, communities and local organisations in Ward 30 of the material, institutional, and relational resources they have previously depended on to report and respond to sexual abuse. This framing was corroborated in all three objectives by participants lived experiences, which were characterized as a collapse of the reporting infrastructure with the withdrawal of the programmes funded by USAID, rather than a drop in the volume of services.

4.6.2 SEXUAL ABUSE REPORTING MECHANISMS POST USAID TERMINATION

The results indicated that there are four reporting pathways used in Ward 30 after the termination of USAID: formal government structures, which include departments of social development; hospital and police victim friendly units; community-based child protection committees; religious and traditional authority structures; and cell phone and SMS reporting. The formal government is still operating as a nominal reporting mechanism, as required by law, as discussed in Chapter 2. The ongoing albeit reduced functioning of CPCs reflects the situation of chapter 2, and the logistical issues identified by Muridzo and Malianga (2015). The increased reliance on religious and traditional authority structures is directly proportional to the pattern reported by Mapiko and Chinyoka (2017). The low level of cell phone and SMS based reporting also reflects on the low level of connectivity and awareness in remote rural wards as mentioned in Chapter 2.

4.6.3 EFFECTIVENESS OF SEXUAL ABUSE REPORTING MECHANISMS POST USAID FUNDING

The results supported the hypothesis that the effectiveness of all four mechanisms was highly limited after the USAID exit. Even though formal government institutions continued to exist, they were not practically accessible as documented by Musiwa (2018) for the Victim Friendly System as a strategy of nominal but not practical accessibility in remote wards. CPCs

maintained community engagement and confidence, but had no ongoing facilitation or training and logistical support to ensure disclosures translate into formal reporting outcomes, which, as found by Shaw et al. (2021), is needed to create sustained behaviour change through community-based approaches. Culturally available religious and traditional authority structures mostly produced customary resolution with limited formal reporting, congruent with the documentation of dare processes by Muridzo (2024) and the findings of Obong'o et al. (2020) of a suppression of disclosure even to religious and traditional authority figures. Although cell phone and SMS reporting was technically possible for those with mobile phone reception, it was limited by low awareness among the community, low mobile phone reception and the lack of operational downstream response services in the ward. At the intrapersonal level, Zimmerman (1995) found that the pattern of internalised disempowerment (beliefs that formal reporting was not beneficial) was found in survivors who experienced inaccessible or ineffective reporting mechanisms across all four mechanisms.

4.6.4 ALTERNATIVES TO IMPROVE SEXUAL ABUSE REPORTING MECHANISMS POST USAID FUNDING

The five alternatives listed by the participants, Strengthening and Resourcing of Community Based Child Protection Committees, capacity building and training of religious and traditional leaders, Community Based Awareness Campaigns Utilising Indigenous Communication Structures, Technology Facilitated Reporting Adopted for Rural Contexts and Economic empowerment, are exactly the five alternatives identified in the literature review in Chapter 2. Evidence from UNICEF Zimbabwe (2022) on community childcare workers connected to case management systems showed that they generated impactful child protection results in 14 districts in Zimbabwe, thus providing support for the empowerment oriented CPC model. Mwangi et al. (2021) and UN Zimbabwe (2022) provide support for the training of faith and traditional leaders. Musemwa and Gomo (2020) and Chakrabarti et al. (2020) have affirmed

the importance of economic empowerment as a basis for reporting. A key cross-cutting finding is that all five alternatives are based on the logic of Empowerment Theory: they are not based on new community structures, they are not based on new services in place of building capacity within existing community structures, and they are financially viable without external donor support - all necessary characteristics of sustainable, empowerment-oriented alternatives in constrained-resource settings. This cross-cutting logic also responds to the caution raised by Dominelli (2021) in Chapter 2 stating that empowerment can never be a replacement for structural support, all five alternatives that were proposed by participants require some level of support from the domestic government in the form of training, coordination or financial support, as the empowerment needs to be complemented by at least minimal structural support rather than remaining symbolic.

4.7 CHAPTER SUMMARY

Chapter provided results of the interviews and FGDs with the community member participants and key informants of Ward 30 Gokwe South. The themes emerging were presented according to the objectives of the study and analysed in the light of the Empowerment Theory by Zimmerman. The results indicated that four typologies of sexual abuse reporting mechanisms were in existence, yet the practical effectiveness of these mechanisms had been drastically reduced after the structural collapse of the USAID-supported system of services. These typologies included: cell phone and SMS-based reporting, religious and traditional authorities, community-based child protection committees, and formal government institutions. Five low cost alternatives in the local community were identified and discussed.

CHAPTER 5: SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.0 INTRODUCTION

This study identified community-based, low-cost solutions to enhance sexual abuse reporting in Ward 30, Gokwe South, after the end of USAID funding in 2025. A summary of key findings, conclusions, recommendations for key stakeholders, implications for social work practice, implications for future research and the Community Empowerment Model for Sexual Abuse Reporting (CEMSAR) are provided.

5.1 SUMMERY OF THE FINDINGS

5.1.1 SEXUAL ABUSE REPORTING MECHANISMS POST-USAID TERMINATION

These included four types of reporting mechanism: formal government institutions (the Department of Social Development and the Victim Friendly System, hospital and police); community-based child protection committees (CPCs); religious and traditional authority structures; and Cell phone and SMS-based reporting in Ward 30. Although formal institutions were set up in law, they were not readily available because of geographic isolation and the cancellation of transport subsidies funded by USAID. CPCs were able to recruit willing volunteers but not logistical or coordination support. The most frequent initial disclosures were traditional leaders and religious leaders. Limited cell phone coverage in portions of Ward 30 and delayed response to reporting contributed significantly to limited cell phone-based reporting.

5.1.2 EFFECTIVENESS OF SEXUAL ABUSE REPORTING MECHANISMS POST-USAID TERMINATION

The study determined that the effectiveness of all four mechanisms for reporting sexual abuse in Ward 30 has been severely limited due to the withdrawal of USAID funding. Formal government institutions, including the Department of Social Development, the Victim Friendly

System at police station and district hospital, maintained their legal responsibilities but were in fact difficult to access due to geographic location, inadequate staffing, and lack of transport, which corroborates Musiwa (2018) that the Victim Friendly System in rural Zimbabwe is nominal rather than accessible. Community-based child protection committees maintained strong potential as a result of their community proximity and trust, but were paralysed by the lack of USAID-funded logistical support and the volunteers were motivated but had no means to escalate cases into formal reporting processes (Shaw et al., 2021). Different formal and informal mechanisms were reported, with religious and traditional authority structures being the most consistent in being used, although the overwhelming practice for customary resolution was mediation and compensation as reported by Muridzo (2024) and the absence of a formal referral. Cell phone and SMS-based reporting provided a low cost and confidential option, but its usefulness was limited by community awareness, which was low after the closure of USAID-funded sensitisation programmes, and the lack of an institutional response capacity, such that successfully transmitted reports rarely resulted in a timely response.

5.1.3 COMMUNITY-BASED, LOW-COST ALTERNATIVES

Five community-based alternatives were identified, including the training and capacity building of traditional and religious leaders as first-line responders of sexual abuse, provision of minimal resources to CPCs, including transport subsistence, airtime, and reinstatement of monthly community-based coordination meetings; community awareness building through indigenous means such as community meetings, church gatherings, and school assemblies; strengthening of telephone and SMS-based reporting channels, with timely responses; and economic empowerment as a sustainable approach to promoting reporting and effectively reducing sexual abuse against women and girls who are not economically independent.

5.2 CONCLUSIONS

The termination of the USAID funding in 2025 left a significant impact on the reporting mechanisms for sexual abuse in Ward 30 (Gokwe South). The overall conclusion of the study is that the formal reporting processes in place before withdrawal were reliant on external donors' support in a manner that made the whole system extremely fragile to donor termination. As Mutasa (2022) states, donor withdrawals do not only diminish services, but also trigger a structural crisis in the empowerment spaces that enable survivors to gain knowledge and access resources and institutional connections to make reporting feasible and safe.

Although government bodies still have a legal duty to accept and act on disclosures of sexual abuse, in practical terms these are limited in Ward 30 by geographical isolation, financial constraints and the failure of the logistical support. This has led to the dissemination of the reporting role to informal community-based systems, largely traditional and religious leaders, who are not trained or equipped to respond to the needs of survivors, and who are not necessarily mandated to refer cases to the formal sector. The barriers to which the survivors are facing are structural in nature, meaning that there is a systemic lack of resources allocation, institutional coordination, and community capacities that prevents them from moving forward as per the Empowerment Theory, the study concludes. Sustainable improvement can be achieved by community based, low cost strategies which build on existing community assets, with support from government led coordination and modest but sustained resource investment.

5.3 RECOMMENDATIONS

5.3.1 GOVERNMENT OF ZIMBABWE

The Ministry of Public Service, Labour and Social Welfare should create a funding mechanism to enable the operational sustainability of CPCs, providing access to basic transport, communication and regular coordination support, without dependence on the donor funding

cycle, in rural wards. Multi-agency coordination fora should be set up at the district level to ensure that referral systems continue to work in wards where NGO coordination support has ceased. The government should also invest in extending mobile network coverage in rural areas that are poorly served, given the key role played by using the cell phone for geographically distant survivors to report.

5.3.2 DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

The Department should lead the way in setting up district level intersectoral co-ordination mechanisms with health services, police, local government and traditional leadership structures, and developing a joint referral system which does not require the need to be co-ordinated by an NGO. The development and implementation of systematic traditional and religious leaders training in Ward 30 should be designed and conducted in survivor-centred approaches, confidentiality and referral procedures. Indigenous channels should be used to ensure regular community awareness of reporting lines are re-established and maintained.

5.3.3 TRADITIONAL AND RELIGIOUS LEADERS

Traditional and religious leaders should be engaged in providing survivor-centred training facilitated by the Department of Social Development and formalise their role as first-disclosure contacts through internal referral processes from survivors to formal services. They need to actively challenge cultural norms that stigmatise survivors and discourage reporting, and encourage discussion about survivors' rights through community and ceremonial forums.

5.3.4 COMMUNITY BASED CHILD PROTECTION COMMITTEES (CPCS)

CPC volunteers need to initiate the Department of Social Development and push for a revival of co-ordination meetings and logistics. Volunteers should support local and religious leaders to create community-level information-sharing systems that ensure that community-level cases are cascaded to formal information reporting systems.

5.3.5 NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANISATIONS

NGOs working in 'post-donor' situations should focus on building capacities and transferring knowledge, designing skill- and system-based interventions that can be integrated into local structures and will continue to function after the donor funds are withdrawn, and should push donors to include transition planning in funding agreements.

5.3.6 BINDURA UNIVERSITY OF SCIENCE EDUCATION

BUSE Department of Social Work should consider introducing a module on sexual and gender based violence in the BSc Honours Social Work curriculum and should also seek to encourage research on donor dependency in social protection systems to strengthen the evidence base for sustainable government-funded social protection advocacy.

5.4 COMMUNITY EMPOWERMENT MODEL FOR SEXUAL ABUSE REPORTING (CEMSAR)

In the light of the study results, the researcher recommends the CEMSAR as a structured framework to enhance the reporting of sexual abuse in Ward 30 and other rural contexts such as the one studied in this research. The model is based on Empowerment Theory (Zimmerman 1995), and focuses on structural, organisational and individual aspects of the disempowerment as a result of the USAID funding end. The main factors in the model that explain the failure to report are: geographic barriers to access to formal structures; barriers to access in terms of cost; formal/informal community structures facilitate a reduction in coordination; informal community education programming has been lost; informal community leaders have not received training in survivor-centered approaches; and fear of stigma and retaliation.

The CEMSAR implements its operation in three levels. The model proposes traditional and religious leaders to be trained as a first disclosure contact in a formalised referral system at the community level, revitalisation and provision of the CPC coordination and use of indigenous

community platforms for ongoing awareness raising. The model includes an intersectoral coordination mechanism at district level, created and driven by the government, which replaces the coordination structure previously provided by USAID-supported NGO partners and involves the Department of Social Development, health services, police and local government. The model calls for national policy and budget support to integrate social protection resources into government budgets, promote investment in rural mobile phone coverage and create national awareness-raising campaigns that are not donor driven.

The community ownership is a key design principle of the CEMSAR, with the intention of not re-creating dependency on external resources that placed the old CEMS at risk during donor withdrawals. External support and government funding, policy commitment and technical training focusing on strengthening embedded community actors, not replacing them. The model tackles empowerment on an individual level by raising awareness among survivors and minimizing logistical obstacles; on a community level through the development of collective capacity to maintain a resilient, locally based reporting system and on an organisational level by providing CPCs, community leaders, and social workers with the tools and coordination systems needed.

5.5 IMPLICATIONS FOR SOCIAL WORK PRACTICE

The results have a number of implications for social work practice in Zimbabwe. Social workers are a key part of the advocacy for the resource and coordination needs of community-based protection structures as critical social protection expenditure with government planning authorities. There is a need to build capacity of traditional and religious leaders on survivor-centred practices such as trauma-informed communication, confidentiality, and referral processes. They shall meet and design district level intersectoral coordination mechanisms and carry out community awareness programmes using indigenous platforms in communities where the programming has been disengaged from NGOs. Social workers must speak out

against cultural norms and institutional practices that marginalise survivors, as well as help shape policies that integrate sexual abuse reporting systems into government-funded and community-managed systems, thereby decreasing reliance on vulnerable external donor funding that is prone to sudden declines.

5.6 AREAS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

There is a need for research to understand how the withdrawal of the donors affects community based child protection system in rural Zimbabwe to create an evidence base for government advocacy for sustainable social protection funding. More research should be conducted on the efficacy of survivor-centred trainings for traditional and religious leaders, to measure if and when trainings result in better reporting. Research is needed to investigate how viable it is to implement USSD and SMS platforms for reporting sexual abuse in rural Zimbabwean communities, as well as the gendered dimensions of barriers to reporting, with a particular focus on how economic dependency and masculinity norms contribute to this. Lastly, information on traditional leaders' views on their involvement in sexual abuse response, in order to design suitable capacity building support, should be gathered.

REFERENCES:

- Alderson, P., & Morrow, V. (2020). *The Ethics of Research with Children and Young People: A Practical Handbook*. SAGE Publications.
- Barth, J., Bermetz, L., Heim, E., Trelle, S., & Tonia, T. (2013). The current prevalence of child sexual abuse worldwide: A systematic review and meta-analysis. *International Journal of Public Health*, 58(3), 469–483.
- Bazeley, P., & Jackson, K. (2013). *Qualitative data analysis with NVivo*. SAGE Publications.5(2), 78–92.
- Beauchamp, T. L., & Childress, J. F. (2013). *Principles of biomedical ethics* (7th ed.). Oxford University Press. 3(2), 191–201.
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77–101.
- Brislin, R. W. (1970). Back-translation for cross-cultural research. *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology*, 1(3), 185–216.
- Bryman, A. (2016). *Social research methods* (5th ed.). Oxford University Press. 62(11), 19–24.
- Chibango, C., & Chibango, F. (2022). Exploring child sexual abuse in Ruwa, Zimbabwe: Prevalence, under-reporting, and community perceptions. *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies*, 78(1), 76–79.
- Chitereka, C., & Chikadzi, V. (2019). Intrafamilial child sexual abuse: Perspectives of victim-friendly court professionals in Marondera District, Zimbabwe. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 93, 85–93.

- Creswell, J. W., & Plano Clark, V. L. (2018). *Designing and conducting mixed methods research* (3rd ed.). SAGE Publications. 5(1), 1–4.
- Creswell, J. W., & Poth, C. N. (2018). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches* (4th ed.). SAGE Publications. 6(4), 2–7.
- DeVellis, R. F. (2016). *Scale development: Theory and applications* (4th ed.). SAGE Publications. 35(1), 78–92.
- Elliott, D. E., Bjelajac, P., Fallot, R. D., Markoff, L. S., & Reed, B. G. (2005). Trauma-informed or trauma-denied: Principles and implementation of trauma-informed services for women. *Journal of Community Psychology*, 33(4), 461–477.
- Etikan, I., Musa, S. A., & Alkassim, R. S. (2016). Comparison of convenience sampling and purposive sampling. *American Journal of Theoretical and Applied Statistics*, 5(1), 1–4.
- Gonzalez, M. A., Rojas, M., & Bouchard, M. (2016). Empowering children to report sexual abuse: A critical analysis. *Journal of Child Sexual Abuse*, 25(5), 516–532.
- Goodman, L. A. (1961). Snowball sampling. *Annals of Mathematical Statistics*, 32(1), 148–170.
- Guest, G., Bunce, A., & Johnson, L. (2006). How many interviews are enough? *Field Methods*, 18(1), 59–82.
- Hoffman, E. (2025). Best alternatives to USAID for NGOs in 2025. *Winssolutions.org*. 25(2), 53–59.
- Kaiser, K. (2009). Protecting respondent confidentiality in qualitative research. *Qualitative Health Research*, 19(11), 1632–1641.

- Krueger, R. A., & Casey, M. A. (2015). *Focus groups: A practical guide for applied research* (5th ed.). SAGE Publications. 21(3), 203–213.
- Kurebwa, J., Chikodzi, D., & Chigora, P. (2025). Community-based child protection systems in Zimbabwe. *African Journal of Social Work*, 15(1), 45–59.
- Kvale, S., & Brinkmann, S. (2009). *InterViews: Learning the craft of qualitative research interviewing* (2nd ed.). SAGE Publications. 10(1), 220–233.
- Leclerc, B., Proulx, J., & Felson, M. (2015). Barriers to reporting child sexual abuse in rural communities: The role of stigma and fear. *Journal of Child Sexual Abuse*, 24(3), 284–302.
- Liamputtong, P. (2007). *Researching the vulnerable: A guide to sensitive research methods*. SAGE Publications. 2(7), 119–125.
- Machingura, F., & Nyamukapa, C. (2023). Child protection in Zimbabwe: Challenges and policy gaps. *African Journal of Social Work*, 13(2), 45–58.
- Masiyiwa, C., Maree, A., & Marongwe, N. (2020). “You suffer whether you tell or don’t tell”: Perceived re-victimisation as a barrier to disclosing child sexual abuse in Zimbabwe. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 108, 104624.
- Mathews, S., Jama-Shai, N., & Lake, L. (2015). *South African Child Gauge 2015: Sexual violence against children in South Africa*. Children’s Institute, University of Cape Town. 12(34), 105–112.
- Marshall, C. (1996). *Designing qualitative research*. SAGE Publications. 22(3), 205–212.
- Mathews, R., & Benvenuti, A. (2018). The impact of support services on child sexual abuse reporting rates: A community-focused approach. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 78, 1–12.

- Melton, G. B. (2019). The role of community coalitions in addressing child sexual abuse. *Child Abuse Review*, 28(2), 93–105.
- Morrow, V., & Richards, M. (1996). *The ethics of social research with children: An overview*. *Children & Society*, 10(2), 90–105.
- Mutanana, N., & Gasva, D. (2015). Community empowerment and child protection in Zimbabwe. *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science*, 5(10), 123–130.
- National Association of Social Workers (NASW). (2017). *Code of Ethics*. NASW Press.
- Nowell, L. S., Norris, J. M., White, D. E., & Moules, N. J. (2017). Thematic analysis: Striving to meet the trustworthiness criteria. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 16(1), 1–13.
- Noy, C. (2008). Sampling knowledge: The hermeneutics of snowball sampling in qualitative research. *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*, 11(4), 327–344.
- Oliveira, S. (2025). USAID funding freeze and its global impact. *DevelopmentAid*. 33(1), 48–57.
- Orb, A., Eisenhauer, L., & Wynaden, D. (2001). Ethics in qualitative research. *Journal of Nursing Scholarship*, 33(1), 93–96.
- Palinkas, L. A., Horwitz, S. M., Green, C. A., Wisdom, J. P., Duan, N., & Hoagwood, K. (2015). Purposeful sampling for qualitative data collection and analysis in mixed method implementation research. *Administration and Policy in Mental Health and Mental Health Services Research*, 42(5), 533–544.
- Patton, M. Q. (2015). *Qualitative research & evaluation methods* (4th ed.). SAGE Publications.
- ,11(6), 79–87.
- Plan International. (2024). *Strengthening child protection systems in Southern Africa*.

- Poland, B. D. (1995). Transcription quality as an aspect of rigor in qualitative research. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 1(3), 290–310.
- Rappaport, J. (1987). Terms of empowerment/exemplars of prevention: Towards a theory for community psychology. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 15(2), 121–148.
- Sadler, G. R., Lee, H. C., Lim, R. S., & Fullerton, J. (2010). Recruitment of hard-to-reach population subgroups via adaptations of the snowball sampling strategy. *Nursing & Health Sciences*, 12(3), 369–374.
- Save the Children. (2024). *Annual child protection report: Zimbabwe*. 22(5), 213–224.
- Sethi, A., & Lin, J. (2016). Community-based approaches to child sexual abuse prevention: Building trust and facilitating reporting. *Child Maltreatment*, 21(3), 203–213.
- Temple, B., & Young, A. (2004). Qualitative research and translation dilemmas. *Qualitative Research*, 4(2), 161–178.
- UNICEF. (2022). *Child protection in Zimbabwe: Post-donor strategies*. UNICEF Zimbabwe. 2(1), 58 – 72.
- UNICEF. (2023). *State of the World's Children: Protecting children from violence*.
- Van de Vijver, F., & Leung, K. (1997). *Methods and data analysis for cross-cultural research*. SAGE Publications. 6(3), 120 – 138.
- World Health Organization. (2023). *Guidelines on responding to child sexual abuse*.
- Yin, R. K. (2018). *Case study research and applications: Design and methods* (6th ed.). SAGE Publications. 5(2), 140–168.
- Wiles, R., Crow, G., Heath, S., & Charles, V. (2008). *The management of confidentiality and anonymity in social research*. *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*, 11(5), 417–4

LIST OF APPENDIXES

APPENDIX 1

BINDURA UNIVERSITY OF SCIENCE EDUCATION
FACULTY OF SOCIAL SCIENCES AND HUMANITIE
DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL WORK



APPENDIX 1:VIEW GUIDE FOR KEY INFORMANTS

STUDY TITLE: ALTERNATIVES TO IMPROVE SEXUAL ABUSE REPORTING MECHANISMS POST-USAID FUNDING TERMINATION IN WARD 30, GOKWE SOUTH

PARTICIPANTS: Social workers from department of social development and a Nurse from Hospital VFU

SECTION A: Sexual Abuse Reporting Mechanisms in Ward 30 Post-USAID Termination

- 1.How cases of sexual abuse are being reported in this community since the withdrawal of USAID funding?
2. How has the reporting process changed since USAID support ended?
3. What services or programmes related to sexual abuse reporting were most affected after the termination of USAID funding?

SECTION B: The Effectiveness of the Reporting Mechanisms

1. How has the withdrawal of USAID affected sexual abuse reporting?
2. Are the current sexual abuse reporting mechanisms working or effective?
3. What are the biggest challenges or barriers that prevent reporting of sexual abuse through the mechanisms that currently exist?

SECTION C: Community-Based, Low-Cost Alternatives to Enhance Sexual Abuse Reporting in the Absence of External Funding

1. In what ways do you think sexual abuse reporting can be improved without relying on external support?
2. Are there any existing community groups, leaders, cultural practices, or local structures that could be better used to support survivors in coming forward?
3. Which community based low-cost reporting mechanisms that be utilized to improve reporting?

APPENDIX 2

BINDURA UNIVERSITY OF SCIENCE EDUCATION
FACULTY OF SOCIAL SCIENCES AND HUMANITIES
DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL WORK



APPENDIX 2: FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION (FGD) GUIDE

PARTICIPANTS: Community Leaders

SECTION A: Sexual Abuse Reporting Mechanisms Post-USAID Termination

1. How cases of sexual abuse being reported in this community?
2. Which people or structures your community currently rely on to report sexual abuse ?
3. Are the ways being used accessible to everyone?

SECTION B: The Effectiveness of the Reporting Mechanisms

1. Are the current reporting mechanisms effective?
2. What barriers or challenges do you think stop survivors from coming forward to report sexual abuse using the structures that currently exist?
3. Are the current reporting mechanisms effective in reporting sexual abuse?

SECTION C: Community-Based, Low-Cost Alternatives to Enhance Sexual Abuse Reporting

1. what would you suggest to make sexual abuse reporting safer and more accessible without outside funding?
2. What existing groups, leaders, cultural practices, or community structures do you think could be strengthened to better support survivors in reporting sexual abuse?
3. What low-cost strategies could help improve awareness and encourage survivors to report abuse?

APPENDIX 3

BINDURA UNIVERSITY OF SCIENCE EDUCATION
FACULTY OF SOCIAL SCIENCES AND HUMANITIES
DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL WORK



APPENDIX 3: CONSENT FORM

**PROJECT TITLE: ALTERNATIVES TO IMPROVE SEXUAL ABUSE REPORTING
MECHANISMS POST-USAID FUNDING TERMINATION IN WARD 30, GOKWE
SOUTH**

About the Research

This study is conducted by an undergraduate Social Work student at Bindura University of Science Education. It explores alternatives for improving sexual abuse reporting mechanisms

in Ward 30, Gokwe South, following the termination of USAID funding. All findings will be used solely for academic purposes.

Your Participation

Your participation is entirely voluntary. You will be requested to take part in an individual interview which, with your permission, will be audio-recorded for accuracy. The recording will be used exclusively for this research and will not be shared with any outside party.

You are under no obligation to answer every question. You have the full right to decline any question or to withdraw from the study at any time, without consequence and without needing to give a reason.

Risks and Benefits

Some questions touch on the sensitive subject of sexual abuse, which may be emotionally difficult. Every effort will be made to conduct the interview in a safe, respectful, and private setting. Referral information to available support services will be provided if needed. You will not receive any financial or material reward for participating, however your contribution may help generate knowledge that better protects survivors of sexual abuse in your community.

Confidentiality and Anonymity

All information shared will be treated with strict confidentiality. Your name and any identifying details will not appear anywhere in the research report. A pseudonym or participant code will be used throughout. Audio recordings and notes will be stored securely, accessible only to the researcher and their academic supervisor, and destroyed upon completion of the research.

Declaration by Participant

I confirm that I have read and understood the information provided in this consent form. I have had the opportunity to ask questions and am satisfied with the responses received. I understand

the purpose and scope of this research, my right to withdraw at any time, and that participation carries no direct personal benefit. I freely and voluntarily agree to take part in this study and consent to the audio-recording of my interview for research purposes only

FULL NAME OF PARTICIPANTS (*optional*)

.....

Signature of Participant:.....DATE.....

Signature of Researcher:.....DATE.....

APPROVAL LETTER

*All communications should be addressed to
The District Social Welfare Officer
Gokwe South District
Department of Social Welfare
MIDLANDS PROVINCE
TEL: 059 2514 or 2595*



*Ministry of Public, Services, Labour
and Social Services
P. Bag 6063*

*GOKWE SOUTH DISTRICT
Cell: 0775594963*

09 January 2026

Bindura University

Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities

Department Of Social work

To whom it may concern

REF: APPROVAL LETTER FOR REBECCA LUTHO

This letter serves to approve Rebecca Lutho, a student from Bindura University to conduct a research study titled 'Alternatives to improve sexual abuse reporting post termination of USAID funding' in Ward 30 Gokwe South District.

Regards

MUDZINGA M




For the DSDO – Gokwe South

Department of Social Development