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COLLEGE OF HUMANITIES

EXPLORING THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF INCEST VICTIMS AND VIEWS OF INFORMANTS

BY

ROBERTA KEKLE SELORMEY

(10374665)

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DECLARATION

I hereby state that this thesis is the result of my own research and has not been presented by anyone for any academic award in this university or any other university. All references used in this work have been duly acknowledged. I thereby bear sole and full responsibility for any shortcomings of this research work.

…….. ……..

Roberta Kekle Selormey **Date**

(Student)

We hereby certify that this thesis was supervised in accordance with the procedures laid down by the University of Ghana.

…….. ……..

Prof. Joseph Osafo **Date**

(Principal Supervisor)

…….. ……..

Dr. Margaret Amankwah-Poku **Date**

(Co-supervisor)

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Abstract

Incest has been described as an abuse which leaves victims with serious adverse effects such as poor psychological health and suicidal tendencies. To curb this menace, efforts need to be made to create positive environments for victims of incest to lessen the effect that the abuse has on the victims. This study thus aimed at exploring subjective experiences of incest victims and the support that key informants in the society could provide, and barriers that hinder the provision of their services to the victims of incest abuse in the Shai Osudoku district in the Greater Accra Region of Ghana. The study was mainly qualitative in nature but used quantitative measures to assess the psychological distress levels of the victims. In all, 20 participants were used for the study, 8 of whom were incest victims and 12, school professionals. Findings from this study showed that the victims of incest received little or no support upon disclosure of the abuse, relied on intrinsic coping mechanisms, experienced high levels of psychological distress and reported suicidal behaviours. Further, school professionals were also limited in the kind of help they could provide due to lack of appropriate personnel and inadequate societal support and infrastructure. These findings imply that, the environment of these victims does not encourage disclosure and trusted adults are unable to provide the needed support and protection that these victims require.

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to parents Mr. and Mrs Selormey and uncle, Mr. Tamakloe for their support, motivation and most of all, inspiring me to pursue my dreams no matter the hurdles. I also dedicate this work to my dear siblings for their love and support throughout my journey, I dedicate this to you all.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

DOVVSU **Domestic violence and victims support unit**

GES **Ghana Education Service**

JHS **Junior high school**

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

This chapter gives an overview of incest globally and in the Ghanaian context including the various psychological distresses accompanying it. Why this is a problem to be investigated is discussed in this section, as well as the relevance and aims of the study are also discussed.

1.1 Background

Globally, incest as a phenomenon has raised a number of concerns due to the devastating effects it can have on individuals. The incest taboo is and has been one of the most widespread of all cultural taboos today across many cultures. This is due partly to the fact that children born out of incestuous acts are at risk of developing genetic disabilities due to inbreeding, even though some of these may be unintentional and may occur due to pregnancy out of casual sex, sperm donation, surrogacy or adoption (Roosa, Reinholtz & Angelini, 1999).The term incest, even though general, may vary in meaning depending on the cultural context. In the African Society, sexual activities between two relations is considered a taboo and hence forbidden (Boakye, 2009). Ahortor, (2016), states that incest is a term used to describe having sex within prohibited categories, listing the prohibited categories as father and daughter, including adopted daughters, mother and son including adopted sons, children of the same parents, including adopted siblings, step brothers and sisters, uncle and niece and aunt and nephew among others. Incest therefore, is defined as any form of sexual activity between people who are closely related by blood; including step relatives, adopted relatives and family members, who are forbidden by law to marry (Yildirim, et al., 2014). The different types of incest that exist include father-daughter incest (biological or step), which has been reported to be the most common incest type, brother-sister, sister-sister, and mother-son

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incest which is known to be the least common one (Yildirim, et al., 2014). According to Yildirim et al., other types of incest include sexual activities between any group of family members such as grandparents, cousins, aunts, uncles, nephews and nieces.

In Ghana, incest is considered an evil act, with persons involved in the act liable to being punished both physically and spiritually for violating the prohibition (Ahortor, 2016). In other words, when offenders are not caught physically, they will be caught spiritually and sanctioned accordingly. The spiritual punishment meted out may be reasons for certain unexplained deaths and deadly diseases that may hit a family which may require special rituals to cleanse them (Ahortor, 2016; Awusabo-Asare & Anarfi (1999). As a result of these moral and spiritual restraints of the phenomenon, it usually goes undisclosed, (Awusabo-Asare & Anarfi, 1999). Even though most cases of incest go undisclosed, it is not the case that the non-disclosure is intentional at all times.

In some rural and peri urban communities, where there is no access to centres where abuse can be reported, such instances may go unreported (Quarshie & Mensah, 2013). Boakye (2009) identified certain cultural factors that have led to nondisclosure of child sexual abuse in Ghana. Among the reasons cited was the fact that patriarchal contexts lead to the flourishing of certain beliefs which tend to trivialize certain negative behaviours and this act of not giving due importance to certain negative perceptions may include undermining certain behaviours that constitute sexual abuse. An example stated was the fact that males were seen to be unable to hold their sexual desires in check and so sexual violations are attributed to being tempted beyond what they can bear; this then leads to victims blaming themselves for the misfortune. Other reason cited by Boakye, (2009) was the "excuse culture," where the blame was put on some possible form of mental illness that the perpetrator might be suffering from, which leads to denial of the act. A third

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reason cited was that the punishments set for sexual abuse did little to encourage disclosure especially in situations where the perpetrator is the breadwinner of the family or is related to the victim.

Similarly, the laws of Ghana consider incest as a criminal act under the Criminal Code (Act 29, 1960) which is punishable by imprisonment of 3 to 25 years (Osam, 2004). Statistics given by the Domestic Violence and Victim Support Unit (DOVVSU) of the Ghana Police Service incidence of incest indicates that there has been a rise in reported cases of incest from 5 cases per year to two hundred and thirty-eight per year from the period of 1999 to 2014, with the figure of reported attempts rising from zero to 110 within the same period (Ghana Police Service, 2015). According to Quarshie et al, (2017), epidemiological studies have further revealed the trend of perpetrators and victims in Ghana. In Quarshie et al's study, most of the perpetrators of the act are middle-aged men coming from low socioeconomic background. The victims of the act were reported to be mostly females, with majority of them being adolescents. A surprising trend that was identified was that majority of the perpetrators were the biological fathers of the victims. It was also noted that these perpetrators used threat as their main tool of manipulation. The reasons assigned for the act among others included the experience of difficulties in marriage, such as sexual needs being unmet, the wife being absent from home and strained relationships with spouses. Other reasons given were diabolical control, where the blame was put on the devil and also, the victim being accused of seduction. Quarshie et al, (2017), further described this form of abuse perpetrated against children as an endemic social problem that demands urgent attention and total commitment from the national governments in the sub-region

Essabar, Khalqallah, and Dakhamait (2015), state that though it is impossible to profile an adequate list of children who may become victims of sexual abuse, it is possible to highlight certain

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characteristics or features that have been noted as cutting across most victims of sexual abuse which may put them at a greater risk of being victims. Such risk factors include age and sex; where adolescent females are classified as being the high-risk population, physical disabilities, low socioeconomic status also, families with poor structures such as parental inadequacy, poor parent-child relationship, parent unavailability and conflict have been highlighted as risk factors, in developing countries. Other risk factors are family tolerated reciprocal father–daughter nudity, low maternal affection, the presence of a male other than the biological father in the home, and low parental affection for one another (Essabar, Khalqallah, & Dakhamait, 2015; Stroebel et al., 2013). Some protective factors against incest are policies that aim at reducing economic vulnerability and discrimination, a society where the norms promote gender equality and rights of women and children, a society publicly disapproving violence, economic stability, especially in the family, high parent education level, support from the extended family, good parenting skills and coping behaviour, good peer relationships and homes that promote gender equality (WHO, 2018).

There have been reports that the increasing numbers of sexual abuse cases in low- and middle-income countries have negative consequences on the physical health and mental health of the children who unfortunately become victims of the act and therefore need culturally appropriate forms of professional intervention (Patel, Flisher, Nikapota, & Malhotra, 2008; Sossou &. Yogtiba, 2008). The kind of incestuous act meted out against children has been classified as sexual abuse. The United Nations Report (2006), states that among the various kinds of abuses children face, sexual abuse is the most common type of violence. Statistics from the World Health Organization also showed that about 21% of women were victims of sexual abuse before the age of fifteen and that the perpetrators were usually male family members such fathers, brothers, uncles and nephews (World Health Organization 2006), with women being the most sexually victimized gender (Word

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Health Organization, 2015). This form of abuse leaves victims with many challenges including mental health issues.

Some of the common mental health issues that have been identified among victims of this form of sexual abuse include loss of trust in close relations as a result of feelings of betrayal, sense of powerlessness, the inability to develop secure relationships in the future, (Anderson, 2006), depression, anxiety, eating disorders, poor self-esteem, somatization, sleep disturbances and anxiety, sexual acting out and inappropriate sexual knowledge and interest. In addition to this, the victims have been reported to engage in self-inflicted harm, four times more as compared to a normal population (Levitan, Rector, Sheldon & Goering, 2003), and also, they have been reported to engage in suicidal behaviour including non-suicidal self-injury (Pickles et al., 2010). As victims of incest, these adolescents begin to equate power with danger and the inability of trusted adults to offer adequate protection against danger (Anderson, 2006).

Adolescence, defined in this study as the period of development between the ages of 11 and 17) (Sebastian, Burnett & Blakemore, 2008), is a very delicate stage in which individuals need attention. This is due to the fact that adolescence naturally is a period where significant physical, emotional and cognitive changes occur which leads to a variety of challenges for the individual such as heighted self-consciousness, (Sebastian, Burnett & Blakemore, 2008). Also, according to de Toledo Blake et al., (2014), during the period of adolescence, girls even though still considered children, begin to develop adult features and look attractive. Since they are still under the care of parents or guardians and have limited autonomy, they are more likely to be taken advantage of and threatened much more than older females. As such, this group of people are considered vulnerable. These challenges on their own may contribute to the occurrence of certain mental health problems if not well managed (Sebastian, Burnett & Blakemore, 2008). Suicidal behaviour has been

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identified as one of the challenges that adolescents face and has become an area that is of concern in many countries (Pompili, Innamorati, Girardi, Tatarelli, & Lester, 2011).

Suicidal behaviour amongst adolescents who are victims of various forms of abuse have been reported to be higher than those who do not suffer any form of abuse. Those who have experienced sexual abuse are six times at risk of having suicidal ideation and eight times at risk of repeating attempts of suicide as compared to adolescents who have experienced other forms of abuse such as physical or emotional abuse (Obineli, 2013). Consequently, there is the need to further explore suicidal behaviour among victims of incest. In a quest to curb this phenomenon from reaching escalating heights, there is a need to also investigate self-harm, an act that is reported to be one of the strongest risk factors for future suicide (Hawton, Rodham, Evans& Weatherall, 2002).

When these victims are identified early and given the necessary help they need, the negative effects of incest abuse will be reduced to a very great extent (Martin & Silverstone, 2013). The low rate of disclosure, however, has been a major barrier in identifying and addressing this issue among victims. As stated earlier, research has shown that some victims feel responsible for the act, or may begin to feel guilty for not reporting the act when it first started. In some instances, the victim may begin to see the abuse as a normal part of life. Other victims have also reported enjoying the incestuous relationship with the perpetrator and as a result, go all out to help protect the perpetrator (Crisma, Bascelli, Paci, & Romito, 2004). Other victims are also threatened not to disclose and are punished if they resist these threats (Fergusson, Beautrais & Horwood, 2003). This however leads to victims refusing to speak up or withdrawing reports of abuse that they may have made or even in certain instances, showing no signs or symptoms of experiencing abuse. These factors make it difficult for other adults to identify or detect the abuse and even offer help

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if they are capable of doing so (Plummer, 2006).

Professionals may have the necessary training to be able to identify abuse in their settings (Faust et al., 2009; Adams et al., 2012). However, these professionals are not always close to these victims and as such, the task falls on other adults to identify individuals around them who may be victims of sexual abuse such as incest (Martin & Silverstone, 2013). Children spend a substantial amount of time in the school settings, as such, school professionals are admonished to act as advocates for children who are victims of sexual abuse. Here, they are called on to look out for children who are at greater risks of becoming victims of sexual abuse (Hinkelman & Bruno, 2008). As such, exploring the effectiveness of teachers in playing their advocacy roles in the schools of victims is also an important step in empowering victims to increase early disclosure. Furthermore, literature suggests that children have very little knowledge of sexual abuse or self-protection skills and many may actually regard sexual touching as acceptable, (Daro and Donnelly, 2002; Kenny, Capri, Thakkar-Kolar, Ryan & Runyon, 2008). This means that, there is a great likelihood of children being abused without being aware and as a result, may not disclose such incidences of abuse. As such, many preventive measures have been aimed at increasing children's understanding of sexual abuse, potential perpetrators and disclosure (Daro and Donnelly, 2002; Kenny, Capri, Thakkar-Kolar, Ryan & Runyon, 2008). Thus, there has been the need for educators such as teachers, to educate children in order for them to have a better understanding about the subject matter and encourage disclosure to avoid further damage.

In addition to this, (Kardam & Bademci, 2013), also state that factors such as victims cognitively appraising their mothers as needy, and socio-economically weak also contributes to the non-disclosure of abuse. Kardam and Bademci also state that most mental health professionals have noted that the victims' mothers' social and economic condition, such as income poverty, lack

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of education, load of domestic work, exposure to domestic violence, and fear of husbands, is an explanatory factor for the non-disclosure of the abuse. As such, there has been the need for other key players or professionals who exist in such communities to help victims of incest. Literature has shown that among those in positions capable of dealing with incestuous abuses are teachers (Kardam & Bademci, 2013, Brubacher et al, 2016). Thus, this study, in addition to exploring the lived experiences of incest victims, also investigated teachers', who have been assigned special roles in schools and act as the first point of call for various abuses, understanding of the incest abuse and their active role in trying curb the menace and prevent further abuse to the victims.

1.2 Statement of Problem

Sexual abuse has been reported to have very negative effects on its victims such as victims engaging in suicidal behaviours including non-suicidal self-harm (Obineli, 2013,). However, research has shown that incest results in even more serious and long-term psychological trauma (Brodosky & Stanley, 2008; Sossou & Yogtiba, 2008). In Ghana, an alarming trend that is seen to be emerging is the rise in Father- Daughter incest (Quarshie et al, 2017). This has been noted with the rise in the number of reported incest and attempted incest cases to the Domestic Violence and Victims Unit (DOVVSU) of the Ghana Police service (Ghana Police Service, 2015). There have also been the speculations that large numbers of such cases go unreported due to the unavailability of appropriate centres to report these cases and stigmatization that is associated with being identified as a victim of incest (Quarshie et al, 2017). These victims of incest are at risk of having mental challenges as well as contemplating or committing suicide if they do not get the help that they need. To be able to offer adequate help, there is the need to understand their experiences in depth. This current study thus, explored the subjective experiences of father-daughter incest

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victims, and linkages with suicidal behaviours among adolescent girls and how they cope with the disclosure or non-disclosure of this trauma. In addition to this, study sought to explore the depth of knowledge of teachers about this phenomenon in their district and skills that they possess in relation to how to offer help to victims of incest.

1.3 Aims and objectives

The main aim of this study is to explore the subjective lived experiences of father-daughter incest victims

The specific objectives of the study include:

1. Exploring the subjective lived experiences of incest victims
2. Exploring the nature of their suicidal and non-suicidal self-harm behaviours
3. Identifying which factors have influenced disclosure or non-disclosure?
4. Investigating the presence of other pathologies among these victims
5. Identifying the strategies that help them cope with the phenomenon
6. Exploring key informants' knowledge about the prevalence of incest cases in their district
7. Exploring resources available to key informants and their knowledge on how to help the victims out

1.4 Relevance of Study

This study is going to serve as a source of data to help inform psychologists and other mental health practitioners about what to focus on when drawing up intervention schemes during any psychotherapeutic encounter with such victims specifically in the Ghanaian context and also educate others who may be at risk of being victims of the incest abuse. Knowledge about the

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resources and skills, the attitudes and perceptions that key informants possess will also help in knowing what specific kinds of training needs to be given to them to enable them identify and help victims that may be under their care. Also, this study will provide information to policy makers to help them come up with effective ways to encourage the disclosure of the phenomenon and appropriate sanctions for perpetrators.

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CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter focuses on the theoretical framework that the study is based on as well as the review of relevant research in the area of sexual abuse and incest and its effect on the individual.

2.1 Theoretical framework

Brofrenbrenner's, (1994) ecological systems theory, modified by Campbell, Dworkin& Cabral, (2009) was adopted to understand the effects of incestuous abuse on the victim how the environment also plays a role in magnifying or reducing the negative impact of the abuse.

2.1.1 Ecological Systems theory - Bronfenbrenner, (1994), modified by Campbell, Dworkin& Cabral, (2009)

There are various kinds of theories that try to explain the psychological impact of sexual assault such as incest on females. However, some researchers, (Campbell, Dworkin & Cabral, 2009), have postulated that the ecological systems theory is a model that is capable of explaining how the complex inter-relationships and factors at multiple levels of the social ecology, contribute to post-assault aftermath that causes psychological distress to such females. The ecological system theory thus assumes that people are part of the complex, interrelated system levels that place them at the centre and move out from the centre to the various systems that shape the individual that is micro, meso, exo, macro, and chronosystem levels (Bronfenbrenner, 1994). According to the theory, the microsystem comprises of the pattern of activities and interpersonal relationships that are experienced by a developing person in a given context, for example the family setting. The

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mesosystem is made up of the links and relationships between two or more settings that the developing individual belongs to, for example the relationship between the home and the school of the developing individual, thus making the mesosystem a link of microsystems. The exosystem also comprises the relationship between two or more settings, at least one of which the developing individual is not directly a part of, but in which events that occur have an effect on the individual or the context in which he belongs. The macrosystem is described as societal blueprint for a particular culture, subculture, or other broader social context. Finally, the chronosystem is a description of the evolution, development or stream of development of the external systems in time (Bronfenbrenner 1994).

In Campbell, Dworkin and Cabral's, (2009) revision of the theory, they postulate that the negative psychological effects of sexual abuse such as incest comes as a result of multiple factors from the environment that the individual is a part of and not just characteristics of the victim. The theory further states that certain characteristics of the assault, post-assault disclosures and help-seeking, and sociocultural norms help shape the way in which this trauma affects women's psychological well-being. In addition to this, the theory emphasizes the cumulative effect of sexual abuse on females', further adding that the responses they get from society greatly influence their mental health (Campbell, Dworkin & Cabral, 2009). This has been reported to be so because sexual abuse such as incest occurs within a societal context and never in cultural isolation (Sanday, 1998). As such, in unsympathetic and hostile environments, victims usually have to negotiate their pathway to recovery. Those who act as social support for the victims usually take actions based on their cultural indoctrinations. Thus, making the trauma of incest transcend beyond the actual abuse to include society's response to the abuse. How these various levels' in the ecological system affect the individual is discussed as follows:

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At the individual level, the characteristics of the assault have been found to affect the level of the victim's trauma. Here, emphasis has been laid on the victim-offender relationship, where the closer the relationship between the victim and the offender, the more traumatizing the effect of the abuse. As such, victims of incest are more likely to suffer greater levels of psychological distress as compared to other sexual abuse victims. Other factors that may affect the level of psychological distress listed by the theory are injury incurred as a result of sexual assault, and the level of perpetrator violence (Campbell, Dworkin & Cabral, 2009).

The most immediate influences on the effects of female's sexual abuse experiences are within the microsystem level, which consists of individuals and groups and close contacts. The micro-system consists of those individuals with whom the individual interacts with frequently and the relationships that he has with them. These include the relationships and communication patterns between an individual and his parents, and the relationship patterns with one's peers and the kind of support which they offer. Here, the disclosure processes have been seen to directly affect the trauma levels of the individual. When the victim receives negative social reactions from family, friends, and peers, there tends to be a more heightened level of anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder as compared to when social response to disclosure is positive (Borja, Callahan, & Long, 2006).

The next levels to consider are the meso and exo system factors. At the mesosystem level, the concern is about the kind of interrelationships that exists between two or more micro-systems to which the individual belongs. For example, the relationship between the family and the school (Bronfenbrenner, 1994). In the mesosystem the activities of one micro system is capable of affecting the activities of the other micro system (Eamon, 2001). The exosystem is the social setting that the individual is not directly a part of but has ways of influencing the individual (Mann

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et al., 2005). In the case of sexual abuse such as incest, the victims tend to resort to various formal social systems for assistance. In cases where help is made available to the victims in an empathic, supportive manner, recovery is facilitated. On the other hand, if they are ignored or treated insensitively, the victims' feelings of powerlessness, shame, and guilt are magnified, which becomes a "second rape," or a secondary victimization to the initial trauma which negatively affects the victims' psychological wellbeing (Campbell & Raja, 2005).

The next level is the macro system, which involves culture or society to which the individual belongs. This level consists of the political ideation of the society, as well as the social, and organizational structures that have a major influence on the other systems in its environment (Bronfenbrenner, 1994). In relation to incest, if the culture of the victim is rape-prone, male violence against females will be tolerated and recovery of sexual assault will be stalled (Harned, 2005). In cases such as incest where the perpetrator was someone the female cared about, there is the belief that harm was not intended and the females tend to blame themselves for the abuse and take away the blame from the perpetrator (Campbell, Dworkin & Cabral, 2009).

The final layer is the chronosystem. This system includes changes that occur over time, the historical events that the individual experiences, and how historical events have influenced the environment to which the individual belongs (Bronfenbrenner, 1994). In relation to incest, the main factor at this level that may have an impact on the victims' recovery is their prior history of victimization. In this case, individuals who suffer multiple incestuous abuses are more likely to suffer greater psychological distress (Campbell, Dworkin & Cabral, 2009).In this current study, all systems of this theory will be explored to find out how sexual abuse is explained at each level of the individual's context.

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2.2 Review of related studies

There has been a great amount of work that has been done in the area of sexual abuse as a whole and on incest across the world.

2.2.1 Experience of incest

Research in this area has sought to investigate the nature of experiences of victims of incest. Most of these researches however did not seek to understand the experiences of the victims from a phenomenological point of view. Anderson, (2006), in a qualitative study, investigated factors that account for resilience among female adult incest survivors. Using the grounded theory method, the author reported that participants, who were between the ages of 25 and 58, described their predicament as being in a mental captivity in their own home, in the sense that even though there were no locks, bars or metal fences caging them, their lives were shaped by the perpetrators. Also, findings from the study showed that power relations between the victims and the offenders also made it difficult for the victims to resist the offenders, with some participants reporting being abused, sometimes in front of other family members or in the same place over and over again. This was also usually followed by perpetrators telling them that no one cared about them. The few who gathered the courage to report the incidence to family members said little to nothing was done to help them, many of them remained silent. As a result of having no support at home to deal with their predicament, they sought other relations outside their homes to help them cope with the situation. These findings highlight the ways in which incest victims make sense of their experiences of abuse and the ways in which they deal with the outcome of the abuse.

Another study by Lorentzen, Nilsen, and Traeenstudy, (2008) sought to explore incest victims' narratives of the termination of the incest abuse. Seven adult women and one man between the ages 19 and 37 were recruited for the qualitative study. Results from the study showed that

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most of the victims reported still feeling like a victim even long after the abuse had ended. The victims also reported lack of support from family, friends, and healthcare personnel when they disclosed the abuse. Another important narrative the study reported was that, the victims stated that the perpetrators of the act wielded some level of psychological power over them too, with culture and the social environment affecting the meanings that the victim attributes to the occurrence.

Additionally, a study by Atwood, (2007), which investigated the reports of 2,345 preadolescent sexual activity among females (2207) and males (138) across varying ages over an internet chatroom survey. Results from this study showed that, out of the number of females that had reported having experienced incestuous sexual intercourse (833), 70% of them experienced the abuse from perpetrators who were their biological fathers or were father figures to them. Also, the victims reported that though the abuse was painful, it had become a part of their lives. These abuses were reported to have usually occurred when the mothers or mother figures were not around them. The study also revealed that the incest abuse was very traumatic, underreported, and not talked about thereby leaving perpetrators unpunished. The method of data collection however poses some limitations for the study. The researcher could not verify the ages and gender of the respondents in some cases and also there was the likelihood of some of the respondents reporting fantasies.

The above research reviews provide evidence for the underreporting of incest cases thereby leading to low disclosure of such abuse. Early disclosure has been found to be very important in reducing the negative effects of sexual abuse (Martin & Silverstone, 2013). However, literature on the disclosure of sexual abuses such as have shown that most victims do not disclose abuse. (Anderson, 2006; Collin-Vézina, Sablonnière-Griffin, Palmer and Milne, 2015)

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2.2.2 Incest and disclosure

In the area of incest and disclosure, research done includes a study by Boateng, (2015), who explored the experiences, reporting behavior and the reporting process among 72 females who were sexual assault victims. Findings revealed that the participants preferred to report the abuse to their family as compared to the police, friends, community leaders church members or to the media and other sources. Further findings from the study were that though some participants preferred to report to the police, others did not because the perpetrators were known to them and preferred for the family to resolve the case. In addition, those who reported to the police expressed dissatisfaction with the reporting process and receiving unfair treatment as they were in turn blamed for the abuse as was the norm with patriarchal societies. However, one limitation with the study was that it used secondary sources of data and such, it was unable to explore the experiences of the participants in depth.

In addition, Anderson, (2006) reported that Adult female survivors of childhood incest, between the ages of 25 and 58, stated they did not disclose abuse incidents because they did not have the words in the first place to describe what they were suffering. They also reported that their attempts to report were futile, and also that they did not disclose because they were afraid of the threats they had received from the perpetrators. In addition to the above, some victims also reported that they were too young to understand what exactly was being done to them. According to Anderson, those who reported to have disclosed the abuse stated that there was little or no action taken, no cry of rage, or show of concern about the incident.

Boakye, (2009), in his qualitative study also investigated some cultural factors that may account for the non-disclosure or underreporting of child sexual abuse by victims and their families in Ghana among 202 participants (117 males, 85 females) who were aged between 14 and 58 years.

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He identified that certain expectations and belief patterns in patriarchal societies such as the males' inability to control their sexual urges, act as sources of distortions to incidences that may constitute abuse and rather lead the victim to self-blame because the victim understands the wrongness of the act. In addition, Boakye indicated that false beliefs about child sexual abuse was another reason for non-disclosure patterns. For example, in instances where participants viewed the act as wrong and the victims as too young to engage in sexually inviting acts, the perpetrators were excused as being mentally unstable. There was also the need to protect the image of the whole family rather than the single abused child because offenses that were considered as taboos had negative implications for the entire family and not just the offender. As a result of this, it was better to sweep such incidents under the carpet. Also, the author found that a significantly higher number of males had higher levels of rape myth acceptance as compared to females. Finally, those with higher education backgrounds had lower levels of rape myth acceptance. This study thus speaks to the existence of norms in the Ghanaian society that encouraged sexual abuse thus, hindering the disclosure of these abuses.

Another qualitative study conducted by Hershkowitz, Lanes and Lamb (2007), to explore the disclosure patterns of sexual abuse among children between the ages of 7 and 9, the researchers reported that more than 78% of children who had been sexually abused by known perpetrators delayed disclosure as compared to those who had been abused by strangers. Those who had suffered repeated abuse even delayed disclosure the more, with older children being more likely to delay disclosure. The authors further stated that the victims who were abused by known people were less likely to disclose the event to parents or care givers but rather disclose to friends or siblings as compared to those who had been abused by strangers. Most of these disclosures were however noted by the authors to have been prompted by people who had suffered less severe

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abuses and had disclosed. In addition to this, it was reported that about 63% of victims who were abused by familiar perpetrators, upon disclosure, faced unsupportive parental reaction as compared to those who had been abused by strangers and in some cases, those who were abused by familial perpetrators retracted their allegations. This thus, study sheds lights on disclosure patterns of children who are familiar with perpetrators as well as those who suffer multiple and harsh sexual abuse patterns. It also highlighted that reactions upon disclosure were strongly associated with the victims' emotions and cooperativeness. Limitations sighted by the authors of the study was that, as at the time of data collection, some of the participants of the study were not believed when they stated they had been abused by family members, thus the findings of the study may be compromised. However, evidence shows that, young children are unlikely to make timely reports when they are abused by their family members (Hershkowitz et al., 2005).

Priebe and Svedin, (2008), in their survey to investigate adolescent disclosure rates and patterns among 4339 high school students (2324 girls and 2015 boys). The mean age of the participants was 18.7 years. Out of this sample, 1,505 girls (65%) and 457 boys (23%) reported having experienced of sexual abuse. Subjecting the data to univariate and multivariate analysis, results revealed that, in the area of disclosure, the researchers also highlighted that even though disclosure rate was found to be high in their study girls (81%), boys (69%), it was hidden from the adult society, that is, from professionals, parents and from authorities. They stated that the victims of sexual abuse rather preferred to disclose the abuse to friends. Also, the participants who reported non-disclosure were found to have experienced more penetrating abuses, abuse by family members, or relatives as compared to participants who reported disclosure. Finally, parental bonding and relation to the offender were also found to be significant determinants of non-disclosure. In summary, findings of the study highlighted the low rate of disclosure of among

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victims of sexual abuse in cases where the perpetrators were family members. Qualitatively delving into this subject would be beneficial in helping to better understand the experiences of these participants.

Collin-Vézina, Sablonnière-Griffin, Palmer and Milne, (2015) qualitatively explored among adult survivors who were victims of child sexual abuse and were between 19 and 69 years, the patterns that impede disclosure of sexual abuse. These researchers stated that most of the victims failed to disclose sexual abuse as a result of certain factors from within, such as, the victims blaming themselves and as a result feeling shameful and embarrassed about the abuse. In addition, the victims not being matured enough at the time of abuse and as such not being able to fully understand what was going on also played a major role in impeding disclosure. Other factors were also cited in relation to others where they stated that victims who came from dysfunctional homes, those who perceived negative reactions upon disclosure and those who just did not have anyone to tell refrained from disclosure. Finally, the researchers stated that, there were also some factors in relation to the social world that prevented some victims from disclosing the abuse. Some of these were societies where talking about one's sexuality was considered a taboo, the labelling or stigma that the victims perceived they might face and the general lack of services or facilities that would encourage disclosure. These findings therefore shed light on some factors that contribute to the low rates of disclosure among sexual abuse victims.

2.2.3 Incest and psychological distress including self-harm and suicide

Incest has been reported to have a lot of negative effects on its victims. Studies have shown a high correlation between sexual abuses, an array of psychological disorders, suicidal behaviours and self-harm (Brodsky & Stanley, 2008; Fergusson, Woodward & Horwood, 2000; Mangilio, 2009). Reports indicate that a large number of people who experiences sexual abuse, particularly

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incest, who do not disclose, or who have disclosed but have not received any psychological help report to have experienced more than average symptoms of psychological challenges such as increased levels of hostility, paranoid ideation, and psychoticism (Young, Harford, Kinder & Savell, 2007).

In a study by Filipas and Ullman, (2006), the authors identified that most people who suffer from sexual abuse are more likely to experience post-traumatic stress disorder, self-blaming and withdrawal behaviour. However, victims of repeated sexual abuse and incest suffer even greater risk of developing post-traumatic stress disorder, withdrawal behaviour and self-blaming. Victims of sexual abuse have also been reported to engage more in certain vices such as drug and alcohol use, acting out sexually and/or aggressively.

Mangilio, (2009), in a systematic review paper which utilized 14 reviews comprising 587 studies, sought to investigate the impact of sexual abuse on the health of victims. It was found that victims were at risk of developing a wide range of psychological disorders including depression, anxiety, stress, paranoid ideation, substance abuse, sexual dysfunctions, eating disorders, hostility, anger, self-esteem and self-concept impairment and interpersonal problems, personality disorders. It was also found that non clinical samples and victims coming from problem families were found to be at a higher risk of developing these psychological challenges as compared to those who were receiving some form of treatment for the abuse. In addition to that, the phenomenon of revictimization, where victims were exposed to becoming victims of sexual abuse was found to be very high.

In addition, Cankaya, Talbot, Ward and Duberstein, (2012), in their survey to find out what factors accounted for suicidal behaviour among depressed women found the women who became depressed as a result of abuse were more likely to engage in suicidal behaviours. It was further

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revealed in the study that those who suffered sexual harassment were at a higher risk of suicidal behaviour as compared to other kinds of abuse. However, those who were abused by familiar people especially their family member (parents) were at an even more heightened risk of attempting suicide if these abuses were accompanied by other family adversities like parental conflict and parental psychopathology. This study revealed even though abuse of an individual resulted in suicidal behaviours, familiarity of the perpetrator of the abuse contributed to enhanced suicidal behaviours.

In investigating the association between sexual abuse, physical abuse, and physical neglect and non-suicidal self-harming behaviour, Yates, Carlson and Egeland, (2008), conducted a survey comprising of 164 participants, (83 males, 81 females) who were 26 years old. Multivariate and Process-level analysis of data reveled that participants who had been sexually abused reported more recurrent self-harming behaviour as compared to the other kinds of abuse with the kinds of relationship that existed between the abused and the perpetrator playing a critical role. Further, those who were abused by parents and who also came from families that were not stable or from low socio-economic status backgrounds reported more recurrent self-harming behaviour. This study thus suggests that child abuse, apart from being associated with other risk factors, contributes to self-harming behaviors among victims. From the literature reviewed, a conclusion can be made that sexual abuse such as incest leads to debilitating consequences in the life of victims. However, there is evidence for victims being able to cope with the abuse and adapt positively through coping mechanisms (Cantón-Cortés & Canton, 2010).

2.2.4 Coping mechanisms

Victims of sexual abuse, especially those who suffered the sexual abuse during childhood have been reported to experience a number of psychological difficulties later in life (Messman-

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Moore & Long 2003). Victims of incest especially, have been reported to suffer the devastating assumption that the safety and benevolence that the world offers has been shattered (Janoff-Bulman and Frantz 1997), an assumption which often leads to the victim's loss of trust and a loss of a sense of purpose and meaning in life (Wright, Crawford & Sebastian, 2007). However, studies have shown that with early adjustment, these victims are able to adjust better and even in some cases report to becoming better versions of who they were before the abuse took place, in other words, although some people with a history of sexual abuse suffer a number of difficulties, some others manage to adapt positively (Canton-Cortes and Canton, 2010).

Gall, (2006), in a survey found that spiritual coping played an active role in determining the distress levels of adult survivors of childhood sexual abuse among 101 adult survivors of sexual abuse. In his study, he reported that the survivors who used self-directed coping experienced higher levels of depression and were angrier as compared to those who used spiritual support coping mechanisms. However, positive and negative forms of spiritual coping were noted to impact the survivors' differently in relation to distress. In the sense that those who used the spiritual discontent coping method reported higher levels of depression as compared to those who reflected a positive attitude towards God. In addition, those who were reported to have been abused also were more likely to surrender their distressing situation over to God rather than use self-directed coping mechanisms. Further, the report indicated that those who suffered the abuse at a very young age were more likely to turn to God for support rather than others due to their early loss of trust in others.

Again, another study Cantón-Cortés and Canton, (2010) on the coping skills of child abuse survivors among 138 female undergraduate college students between the ages of 18 and 24 years who had been sexually abused before 14 years, as well as another 138 participants who experienced

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no abuse who were used as a comparison group. The researchers identified that victims of childhood abuse reported significantly higher levels of evasion coping methods, and moderate use of avoidant coping strategies as compared to participants who were not victims of sexual abuse. Victims who used avoidant coping strategies were more likely to experience more distress compared with other coping strategies they used such as the evasion coping, nervous coping and self-destructive coping methods. However, those who experienced continued intra-familial sexual abuse scored even higher on distress as a result of self-destructive and evasion coping strategies as compared to those who suffered extra-familial abuse.

In a mixed method study, Wright, Crawford and Sebastian, (2007), sought to explore the positive resolution of 60 adult female childhood sexual abuse survivors. In the study, it was reported that females who had not resolved issues surrounding their abuse were more likely to use avoidant coping strategies than those who had resolved them and those who used this coping strategy were more likely to experience more psychological distress. Also, the avoidant coping strategy was found to be linked to higher depressive symptoms. Problem solving coping was also found to be infrequently used. Another finding in line with social support was that, the female sexual abuse survivors scored low on the social support measure, a measure which sought to find out how actively the participants sought for support and not the availability of social support for them. In addition, it was found that some participants derived some positive benefits from coping with their sexual abuse experiences, such as not risking further abuse and wanting to protect others from going through similar experiences.

In literature on various kinds of abuse, especially sexual abuse, there usually has been the call for other adults like the non-perpetrating guardian, professionals and non-professionals who may be in constant touch with the vulnerable to be equipped with the necessary or basic skills in

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order to be able to identify and offer help to these victims (Márquez-Flores, Márquez-Hernández, & Granados-Gámez, 2016).

2.2.5 Key Informants

In an article by Daro and Donnelly, (2002), on the prevention of child abuse, the authors highlight that sexual abuse, especially the one that occurs in the home such as incest, usually occurs in the full glare of the non-perpetrating parent. This usually occurs because they may not have had positive parental models in their own childhood, as such they do not provide positive parenting for their children. In light of this, Daro and Donnelly, (2002), have suggested that in order for all to benefit from early intervention and termination of abuse, other adults whom the victims have frequent contact with, such as school professionals should be equipped to detect such victims early. However, this has not been the case since they feel ill equipped.

Another research conducted by Kardam and Bademci, (2013) sought to understand how professionals view non-offending mothers in cases of incest. Ninety-eight professionals, mostly made up of people who were close to these victims and could facilitate disclosure. These various professionals pointed out and acknowledged the insufficiencies and inconsistencies of the mothers in dealing with the abuse due to incest by underlining their poor socio-economic status and social vulnerability. Thus, there is the need for these professionals to step in to offer help and support to victims of incest. Researchers in this field have also investigated the perceptions of teachers on sexual abuse and results have similarly shown that most teachers do not have the needed skills.

Márquez-Flores, Márquez-Hernández, and Granados-Gámez (2016) sought to investigate teachers' knowledge and beliefs about child sexual abuse among 450 teachers aged between 23 and 68 years. The participants were recruited from public schools, semiprivate, and private schools in Malaga, Spain. The results from the study showed that 65.3% of teachers reported not having

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received any form of training in child sexual abuse education. However, about 75% of the teachers had an understanding of the kinds of environments in which majority of sexual abuses were likely to occur. In addition to that, the participants demonstrated the understanding that even though sexual abuses occurred in both genders, females were more likely to experience it more and male were more likely to be perpetrators of the act. It was also found that, more than half the teachers did not know the legal consequences of child sexual abuse, and further stated that sexual abuse cases should be handled considering issues that may affect the well-being of the minor as opposed to legal obligation or moral and ethical duty. In other related studies, researchers have found that there may be certain barriers that act as hinderances to teachers' disclosure of abuses among students.

One of such studies is by Falkiner, Thomson and Day, (2017) who's qualitative study was conducted among 30 Australian teachers (24 females, 6 males). The researchers found that, despite laws being passed which made the reporting of abuses mandatory for teachers, some of them were still reluctant in reporting abuses. The main barriers of reporting abuses that was found from this study included inconsistent and inadequate mandatory reporting training, which included the channels and protocols to follow when reporting abuse cases, the complexities of mandatory reporting channels, lack of confidence of the teachers in detecting child abuses beyond cases that demonstrate obvious physical signs and finally the need for certainty about an abuse and the repercussion of making a false report. However, the researchers' have stated that there is the need to overcome these barriers in order to provide a safe space for victims of abuse to receive help.

As such, Kenny, Capri, Thakkar-Kolar, Ryan & Runyon, (2008) also in their article have suggested that many children benefit from school-based programmes organized to curb sexual abuse such as incest. As such, bodies of safety programmes need to be developed and implemented

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by school professionals to train both students and parents on the appropriate practices and risk factors of sexual abuse in order to curb the menace.

2.3 Rationale

There have been limited studies in the area of incest in relation to the victims of the abuse (Anderson, 2006; Atwood, 2007; & Lorentzen, Nilson & Traeenstudy, 2008). In addition, sexual assault has been described to be the fastest growing crime with very few non-western researches addressing the phenomenon as compared to the west. (Boateng, 2015). Most studies done in this area so far have concentrated on sexual abuse in its totality and its adverse effects on individuals, where incest features as a type of sexual abuse among others being studied (Hershkowitz, Lanes &Lamb, 2007; Priebe & Svedin, 2008; Canton-Cortes & Canton, 2010). Some studies have however concentrated on just incest, but these mostly concentrate on the experiences of adult survivors of incest (Anderson, 2006; Lorentzen, Nilson & Traeenstudy, 2008), with just a few concentrating on the experiences of child victims of incest. In addition to this, Boakye, (2009), states that in addition to inadequate data on incidents of child sexual abuse in Ghana, few researches that have investigated child sexual abuse in the Ghanaian society. Studies that have been conducted so far on incest as an abuse in Ghana have focused on the epidemiological characteristics of incest victims and perpetrators (Quarshie et al, 2017). In addition, Martin and Silverstone, (2013) have identified that there is a gap in research when it comes to knowing whether other adults such as teachers, have the right knowledge and skills to identify these victims of abuse and also offer the needed help to victims. There is therefore the need to investigate the dearth of knowledge of these other adults in relation such kinds abuse.

2.4 Research Questions

The main question of the study was:

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What are the subjective experiences of the adolescent victims of Father-daughter incest victims?

This study sought to address the following questions:

1. How do victims currently relate with their abusers?
2. What have been the victims' difficulties in sharing their stories?
3. Do victims engage in suicidal behaviours and non-suicidal self-harm?
4. What is the nature of victims' suicidal behaviours?
5. What other pathologies are present among these victims?
6. How have they been coping?
7. Do key informants know about the prevalence of incest cases in their district?
8. How equipped are these key informants to be able to help these victims in terms of social and human resources?

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CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

This chapter presents the design of the study, the data collection site, the participants of the study, the instruments used in gathering data, the data analyses strategy that was employed, the ethical considerations as well as means by which trustworthiness was ensured.

3.1 Design

This study employed the concurrent quasi mixed design approach to data collection. This is a method of data collection described by Teddlie & Tashakkori, (2006) as a design where researchers work mainly within the qualitative design, but collect and analyse some portions of the data quantitatively in order to answer different aspects of the same question without or without an intent to integrate. Specifically, the hermeneutic phenomenological approach, which was the primary method of investigation, entailed using detailed interview guides to explore the subjective experiences of the participants. In addition, clinical diagnostic questionnaires were used to assess the presence of any mental health difficulties among the participants and offer descriptive data of the participants. This approach to data collection was used in order to simultaneously to ask exploratory questions and confirm certain strands of the exploratory questions. (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2006).

3.2 Research Settings

This study was conducted in the Shai Osudoku district of the Greater Accra Region. Data was collected from four schools in the district with pseudonyms School A, School B, School C and School D. These schools were identified by unofficial reports from a Girl Child Coordinator in charge of a Girls' Club set up by the Ghana Education Service (GES), aimed at identifying and

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helping girls in distress. The reports from the Girl Child Coordinator suggested there were pupils in the above-mentioned schools who had reported experiencing incestuous abuses.

The Shai Osudoku district is located in the coastal savannah agro-ecological zone of Ghana. The district, formally a traditional council under the Dangme west District, contains a few large settlements, scattered villages and has been described as more rural than urban due to its poor infrastructure, pipe-borne water and roads (Wrigley-Asante 2008). The family system practiced in the district is mainly the extended family system, with inheritance being patrilineal. According to Gyapong, et al, (2013), women are considered subordinate to men, as the allocation of resources are more in favour of men as compared to women, regardless of capabilities. This subordination of women to men is however reinforced by strong social conditioning, which makes men take precedence over all of the life cycle rituals with the exception of puberty rites. Single, widowed or divorced women are even more disadvantaged with regards to this system of practice. In addition, the traditional system allows the men to practice polygamy depending on their ability to cater for their families (Gyapong, et al, 2013). Most of the dwellers are Christians and believers of traditional religion. Their main occupation is Subsistence farming with a few engaged in petty trading and the commercial farming of exotic banana and mango (Asase, Akwetey & Achel, 2010).

3.3 Population/ Sample

The population of the Shai Osudoku district, as at the 2010 census was 51,913, with a male population of 25,292 and a female population of 26,621. Dodowa, its capital had a population of 12,070 residents. However, there was a projected population estimate of 60,915 as at 2018 (GSS 2014). The participants for the study comprised of twenty people in total, a number which is considered appropriate according to Creswell, (1998) who recommends between five and twenty-five participants for a phenomenological study. Of these participants were eight female victims of

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father –daughter incest between the ages of thirteen and seventeen and twelve were key informants. According to Smith, Flowers and Larkin, (2009), for complex human phenomena such as incestuous abuse, the aim of qualitative research is to bring out rich detailed accounts and such, the concern was on the quality of the accounts and not the quantity of the accounts. As such, a large number of participants were not used for the study.

Inclusion Criteria

Participants who were included in the study:

a. had been abused by their father figure

b. were between the ages of 11 and 17 (Sebastian, Burnett & Blakemore, 2008).

c. or were key informants (teachers who played the role of Girl Child Coordinators of GES in the district).

Exclusion Criteria

Participants were excluded in the study if they:

a. were not incest abuse victims

b. were below 11 years or above 17 years

The purposeful sampling technique was used in selecting the participants, where the researcher relied on key informants in order to identify the interviewees. Twelve girls were initially approached to take part in the study. However, 4 out of the 12 girls identified did not take part. Two of these girls refused to give consent to participate in the study, one girl was reported to have gotten pregnant and moved by her family to another town and no one knew the whereabouts of

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one of the girls. Table 1 and Table 2 below show the demographic information of incest victims and key informants.

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Table 1 Demographic Table for incest victims

Participant number	Age	Religion	Education	Staying with	Abused by	Occupation of guardian	Number of abuses
Esi	16	Christian	JHS	Grandmother and maternal uncle	Guardian	Male: farmer Female: unemployed	One-time abuse
Ama	15	Christian	JHS	Aunt and her husband	Guardian	Female: petty trader Male: not stated	Multiple abuse
Akua	14	Christian	JHS	Sister and her husband	Guardian	Male: driver Female: trader	Multiple abuse
Afua	15	Christian	JHS	Mother and maternal Uncle	Guardian	Male: farmer Female: petty trader	One-time abuse
Ami	15	Christian	JHS	Mother and maternal Uncle	Guardian	Male: trader Female: trader	One-time abuse
Yaa	13	Christian	Primary	Biological mother and step father	Guardian	Male: not stated Female: petty trader	One-time abuse
Abena	15	Muslim	JHS	Biological father and 2 step mothers	Biological father	Male: mason Female: petty traders	Multiple abuse
Serwaa	17	Muslim	JHS	Biological father and step mother	Biological father	Male: herdsman Female: herdswoman	One- time abuse

JHS- Junior High School

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Table 2 Demographic table for Key informants

Participant number	Gender	Age	Religion	Education	Years of experience	Extra role
T1	Female	Late 50's	Christian	Degree	30	Guidance and counselling coordinator
T2	Female	Mid 30's	Christian	Degree	5	Girl Child Coordinator
T3	Female	Late 30's	Christian	Degree	10	Guidance and Counselling Coordinator
T4	Female	Mid 30's	Christian	Degree	9	Girl Child Coordinator
T5	Female	35	Christian	Degree	5	Girl Child Coordinator
T6	Male	34	Christian	Degree	12	Guidance and Counselling Coordinator
T7	Male	Late 30's	Christian	Degree	15	Guidance and Counselling Coordinator
T8	Male	41	Christian	Master's Degree	16	Guidance and Counselling Coordinator
T9	Female	35	Christian	Degree	9	Girl Child Coordinator
T10	Female	30	Christian	Degree	10	Girl Child Coordinator
T11	Female	46	Christian	Degree	16	District Girl Child Coordinator
T12	Female	48	Christian	Master's degree	18	District Guidance and Counselling Coordinator

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3.4 Instruments and Materials

3.4.1 Demographic questionnaires

This questionnaire aided in gathering information about the age, sex, educational level, religion, living conditions of the participants and age of first abuse (see Appendix A)

3.4.2 Qualitative interview guide

An interview guide was developed to purposely explore the various subjective lived experiences of the victims of incest (see Appendix B). This interview guide sought to gather data on the participants' thoughts and feelings before and after the act, how the act occurred and their experience, the kind of support systems available for them and whether or not they have sought disclosure. This guide contained 17 questions with probes to further clarify information from the participants or obtain in-depth information (see Appendix B). Another interview guide, containing 19 questions, was used to gather information from the key informants regarding their knowledge of these girls, how they handled these victims and the resources they perceived to be available to them to help them provide services for these victims (see Appendix B).

3.4.3 Depression, Anxiety and Stress Scale -21 Items (DASS-21, Lovibond &Lovibond 1995)

This 21-item questionnaire is a short version of the 42-item self-report measure developed by Lovibond and Lovibond (1995) which assesses the levels of emotional distress (see Appendix A). It is divided into three related sub categories of depression, anxiety and stress, measured on a 4-point rating scale, ranging from 0 (did not apply to me at all) to 3 (applied to me most of the time), with each subscale made up of seven items.

The depression sub-scale assesses states of dysphoria, hopelessness, devaluation of life, self-deprecation, lack of interest/involvement, anhedonia and inertia. The anxiety sub-scale also

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measures autonomic arousal, skeletal muscle effects, situational anxiety, and subjective experience of the anxious response. Finally, the stress sub-scale measures difficulty relaxing, nervous arousal, being easily upset/agitated, irritable/over-reactive and impatience (Lovibond & Lovibond, 1995).

The total scores for each subscale is summed and multiplied by 2 to obtain the overall score with the total scores ranging from 0 to 42. For the depression subscale, scores ranging from 0-9 means mild, 10-13 is moderate, 14-20 is severe, 21-27, and extremely severe is 28+. For the anxiety subscale 0-7 means normal, 8-9 is mild, 10-14 is moderate, 15-19 is severe, and 20+ is extremely severe. For the stress subscale normal is 0-14, mild is15-18, moderate is 19-25, severe is 26-33 and extremely severe is 34+. Higher scores suggest the presence or high levels of psychological distress while lower scores depict absence or low levels of distress (Lovibond & Lovibond, 1995). The Cronbach's alpha of the Depression subscale was reported to be, .93, that of the Anxiety subscale was .85 and that of the Stress subscale was .90. The total Cronbach's alpha for the entire scale was reported to be .95. (Dahma, Wong & Ponsford, 2013).

In addition, Bottesi et al., (2015) also report that DASS-21 scale had a good convergent and divergent validity and also a good criterion validity. The total internal consistency for the DASS-21 was reported to be .90; that for the Depression scale was reported to be .82; that for the Anxiety scale was reported as .74 and finally, that of the Stress scale was .85 (see Appendix A).

3.4.4 The Suicidal Behaviour Questionnaire Revised (Osman, Gutierrez, Konick, Kopper & Barrios, 2001)

This is a brief four item self-report measure that assesses four different domains of suicidal behaviour in order to predict future suicidality (see Appendix A). Item 1 assesses suicide ideation or attempt, item 2 assesses the frequency of the behaviour, item 3 assesses the threat of suicidal attempt and item 4 assesses the likelihood of attempting suicide in the future. The total score ranges

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from 3 to 18. Participants who score higher than 2 on each item are considered at risk of suicide. However, total scores above 7 are also considered at risk of suicide (Osman, Gutierrez, Konick, Kopper & Barrios, 2001). The scale has a Cronbach's alpha of .76, each selected item is assigned a score which is then summed (see Appendix A).

3.5 Ethical Considerations

Before data collection began, ethical clearance was sought from the University of Ghana Research Ethics Committee for Humanities. The ethical reference number for the study is ECH 077/17-18. Secondly, permission was sought from the GES in the Shai Osudoku District. Following that, a letter for permission was taken from the Psychology Department of the University of Ghana to the schools identified to seek permission for data collection.

After permission was granted, the researcher sought informed consent from the participants before data collection started. The participants were assured of confidentiality and anonymity. The participants were made to understand that their participation in the study was voluntary and of their right to withdraw from the study at any point in time during the research period. The researcher was also available to address any misconceptions, misunderstandings and questions that arose during data collection. In addition, the interviews and questionnaires were administered in a private room that the school authorities assigned for the purpose.

A consent form was given to the Girl Guide coordinators and Guidance and Counselling Coordinators in each school where the girls were located. An assent form, which included the nature, purpose, risks and the fact that there will be no compensation for participation, was provided to the participants to fill and appended their signature on.

The quantitative data collection instrument included a section that gave a detailed explanation of the nature and the purpose of the study and also the procedure required for filling

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the instruments. Because the phenomenon under study was very sensitive in nature, the researcher identified girls who suffered emotional distress and referred them to qualified clinical psychologists at the Department of psychology in the University of Ghana. Girls who also did not show signs of emotional distress but were identified by the research instruments as people who may need help were also referred to a qualified clinical psychologist from the Department of Psychology, University of Ghana who was at Oyibi, a town close to Dodowa.

3.6 Procedure

After ethical clearance was granted from the ethical committee for Humanities, letters were taken to GES first and then to the schools within the study site for permission to collect data. With assistance from key informants, that is heads of the schools, the Girl Child Coordinators and Guidance and Counselling Coordinators, the participants needed for the study were identified and recruited, however, there was the suspicion that cases were under reported.

In instances where the identified victims were either not available or refused to partake in the study, the females in the school were gathered and given a short talk on sexual abuse, its effects and the need for disclosure. This proved to be effective as through this procedure, one victim who had never disclosed abuse felt the need to disclose her experience to the researcher, and in effect, providing more participants for the study. The Girl Child Coordinators of the schools acted as the guardians of the girls and signed the guardian consent forms. These guardians already knew about the act since the club serves as a form of social support for the victims of abuse such as incest. These coordinators acted as guardians because due to the nature of the subject of investigation, parents or family members were unlikely to grant approval, since in most cases they were the perpetrators of the abuse.

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The participants were then briefed about the research procedure after which verbal and written assent was sought with emphasis on the fact that they were free to opt out of the study if they so desired. Data collection took place at make-shift spaces created by the Girl Child Coordinators which was away from the main playground, classroom and offices in the school in order to ensure confidentiality. This was usually behind the school. The participants were assured that their names were not going to be attached to their voice recordings and so were given codes instead and they were also assured that no pictures were going to be taken. Also, to ensure that their quotes would not be identified with them, pseudonyms was given to them. In addition to carefully explaining details of consent to them, the participants were further assured that their data was only going to be used for academic purposes and as such were given contact details of who to reach out to if they felt confidentiality was being breached. Data was collected in English language beginning first with the interview and immediately followed by questionnaire administration. The interviews lasted between 45 minutes to about 60 minutes, depending on the disposition and willingness of the girls to continue with the interview. This was immediately followed by the administration of questionnaires, which took about 15 minutes to be completed.

3.6.1 Data collection in Dodowa

After permission was granted by GES, the researcher proceeded to collect data. Data was collected from three schools located at Dodowa, and for the sake of anonymity, they were given pseudonyms as school A, B and C. School C was where data collection began. In this school, no incest victim was found. The Guidance and Counselling Coordinators and the Girl Child Coordinators were however interviewed because they reported that they had handled victims of incest before either in their previous school or a few years ago in their current school.

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The researcher then moved to School A. In this school, the researcher, with the help of the headmistress, Girl Child Coordinator, the researcher was able to identify 8 girls to be interviewed, however, one girl was reported to have been pregnant and was taken out of the community by her family, another had also stopped attending school, which left the researcher with 6 girls to interview. Four girls were initially interviewed in two days, another one was interviewed after three weeks due to her absence from school. Another participant was also interviewed at home as she had missed school for three weeks because her school uniform had been damaged and she needed a replacement. After the girls were interviewed, the Girl Child Coordinators and Guidance and Counselling Coordinators were also interviewed.

The researcher finally moved to School B. Here again, the researcher was aided by the headmaster and the Girl Child Coordinator to identify victims, two girls were initially identified, however, only one gave her consent to agree to take part in the study with the other stating that she was not a victim even though the Girl Child Coordinators reported she was. After interviewing the girl who consented, the Girl Child Coordinator and the Guidance and Counselling Coordinator, were also interviewed since they stated that they had knowledge of the incest abuse in the community and also handled some cases of incest.

3.6.2 Data collection in Asebi

The next point of data collection was Asebi where school D was located. After the researcher got to Asebi, the necessary contacts were made and with the aid of the headmaster, one girl was identified as a victim of incest.

3.6.3 Data collection at the Ghana Education Service

The next point of data collection was the district office of the Ghana Education Service (GES), located at the Dodowa. At the district office, the researcher made contacts with the heads

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of the Girl Child Coordinators and Guidance and Counselling Coordinators. Interview dates were scheduled and they were met for the interview. Further contacts were made and the Domestic Violence Victims Support Unit of the Ghana Police Service was to be included in the study. Unfortunately for the researcher at this point, further interviews were cancelled because of an attempted sexual assault on the researcher as steps were made to go back to Asebi to interview the Guidance and Counselling Coordinator and the Girl Child Coordinator of school D. This will be discussed further under reflexivity.

3.7 Reflectivity

Conducting qualitative research puts the researcher in many positions that may have an effect on the final outcome of the research. Being reflective thus puts the researcher in a position to acknowledge certain factors that may have had a potential influence on the research and the measures taken to address those factors. (Palaganas, Sanchez, Molintas & Caricativo, 2017). In view of the above, this section describes how my personal experiences, values and background may have affected the research experience and the measures used to address them.

To begin with, my interest in studying sexual abuse stemmed from experiences I had with clients whiles doing my practicum for my MPhil studies and coming into contact with victims of sexual abuse, some of whom were abused by their own relations, a phenomenon which was gradually coming to light. To better understand these victims, who had been abused by their relations in order to conduct successful therapy sessions, I decided to explore available literature on the topic. Most researches I came across were from westernized countries. In a bid to conduct a culturally appropriate therapy, I decided to focus mainly on researches from Africa, most specifically Ghana, but to my utmost dismay, I did not come across any paper that addressed that topic. I began to ask myself what was preventing research in the area of incest. I understood that

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the area was a very sensitive one, but I felt it was an area that should not be neglected since per my readings, it did even more harm to its victims as compared to other forms of abuse. In a discussion with a clinical psychologist, I was informed about reports of incest abuse in some schools in Dodowa. This phenomenon gave birth to the current research topic since among other issues, as there was a gap in that research area in the country. With the information I received and read, I was of the view that incest was going to be a crippling experience.

Upon further exploration of literature, I began to ask myself questions such as what were the experiences of victims of incest? What was preventing them from disclosing the incident? If they were disclosing the incident, what was preventing punitive actions from being taken? What were the social structures in place to protect the victims? What was the psychological effect of the act on the victims? I made contact with the teacher who reported the incest cases to my supervisor. She was in Dodowa in the Shai Osudoku District, and that district was going to be my research site. I arranged for a meeting with her, she became my gatekeeper and aided me to seek permission from the Ghana Education Service

After being given the go ahead to conduct the study, I made several visits to the schools I was going to collect data from. Some school professionals told me about experiences which left me shocked and bewildered. My first meeting with a victim left me in a very low mood and optimism, a low mood because the story I had heard made me feel sad and optimistic because I realized getting participants was possible. This made me realize how challenging it was going to be to bracket my feelings as an individual and conduct the research. I spoke to my supervisor after the first encounter and discussed with him my feelings and he further explained the need to bracket my personal feelings.

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Initially, I felt being a young female assuring them confidentiality was going to be enough to elicit disclosure. However, that was not the case. Most of the girls were intimidated as they perceived me as very learned young adult who was capable of being their teacher by virtue of the fact that I spoke very good English and dressed in a manner they perceived was only meant for the 'rich' folk. They thus tagged me as an individual from a high socio-economic background. This created a power distance and also created the perception that I could not understand how they felt about issues. They also felt I was capable of punishing them if they made a 'mistake' in the interview process as is the experience when they fail an academic examination. I earned the name Aunty Roberta or Madam Roberta as a result of this. Upon realizing this, I had to put in much effort in getting them to understand that I was there as a friend who wanted to understand the experiences of girls who had suffered abuse in a bid to develop efficient support systems for such girls. This included speaking broken English to make them feel comfortable to talk. To further assure them of confidentiality, I assured them that I was not familiar with the people in the community and as such it was not likely that I was going to share their stories with other people in the community, as was one of their fears. This also meant reducing frequent contacts with their teachers for side talk, apart from when I had to interview them. This was because they felt I was going to report issues they had discussed with me to their teacher.

According to Armstrong, (2012) in conducting feminist research interviews it is necessary to give precedence to power balances between the researcher and the participant. In order to be able to negotiate power. Having the girls agree to partake in the interview also did not mean that they narrated their experiences without challenges. Some girls had great difficulties narrating their stories. Interviews had to be paused intermittently and, in some cases, suspended and rescheduled

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for another time. This was because they broke down in tears, began to involuntarily tremble, sweat profusely or became short of words in addition to being very sad.

This was very challenging as it meant I had to provide psychological therapy for them before continuing with gathering data. For some of them, details of the act had to be skipped because it triggered unpleasant psychological responses. Another also resorted to giving one-word responses just to avoid giving intricate details about her ordeal. This was a very difficult point for me also as I was scared that I would lose my already scarce participants. However, after having brief therapy sessions with them and rescheduling meeting times, the interviews were successful and most girls stated that the process brought them a lot of relief. Hearing this also gave me a lot of relief to my delight because I was also scared of the ethical implications that causing psychological distress might have. In helping these girls deal with psychological distress that occurred during the interviews, the victims who were found to be suicidal were referred to the guidance and counselling or Girl child Coordinators they trusted to keep an eye on them. All the victims were however referred to a clinical psychologist for further assessment and counselling. However, as a clinical psychologist in training, my next line of action will be to draw up an intervention for the girls who would want and benefit from it. This is to ensure that the girls are not left to deal with their negative emotions alone but are guided and provided with continued psychological care and taught better ways to manage their emotions.

I had several emotional challenges as I worked on this project. This was my first qualitative study and having to investigate such a sensitive issue as incest. Interacting with the girls as well as the stakeholders had a lot of impact on my emotions. I realized that coming into contact with incest cases on the field had a bigger impact on my emotions than it had when I read about them in research articles. Even though this was anticipated, it hit me harder than I expected. I felt angry,

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upset, surprised, and pity at the level of abuse that these young adolescents had to endure. I began to ask myself if my emotions were not going to influence my interpretation of events. To deal with these emotions, I discussed them with my supervisor, as well as taking breaks to ponder and reflect on my position as a researcher in the current study.

Collecting data from the teachers in the schools and at GES office was much simpler than it was for the girls. At this point, power distance was not a problem. Many were excited about the research topic and wished me the best with the exception of one participant who kept stating that I would not get participants for my study because those who were supposed to lead me into the schools were also guilty of committing such crimes. This official was a circuit supervisor of one school I collected data in. He attempted sexually assaulting me and at that point data collection had to seize because I needed time to recover from the traumatizing incident and seek psychological therapy. I took a break entirely from the work for about two months whiles seeking therapy. I resumed work once I was declared fit by my therapist.

In all data collection, transcribing and analysing came with some challenges, most of which were emotional. However, at each stage, reflecting through the processes, I tried to address the challenges that were arising in order for it not to affect the validity of the research.

3.8 Data Analyses

3.8.1 Descriptive Data Analyses

The Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 23.0 was utilized in obtaining the descriptive statistics of the data obtained from the participants with the clinical diagnostic measures used. These clinical diagnostic tools assessed depression, anxiety, stress as well as suicidal ideation.

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3.8.2 Qualitative Data Analysis

The qualitative data from the incest victims was analysed using the Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) where the precise extracts of the participants' experiences were interpreted in the context that they spoke from through a process of coding, organising, integrating and interpreting data that was gathered, (Reid, Flowers & Larkin, 2005). The IPA approach was used to analyse data because this analytical strategy's main aim is to bring out the meaning that the participants make of lived experiences of certain phenomena. As such this method is subjective as its main focus is on the individual participant even though it maps out similarities in accounts of various participants (Jonathan, Smith & Larkin, 2009).

Larkin and Thompson's (2012), steps for analysing data using IPA was followed in analysing the data. The processes are outlined as follows: First of all, the data was transcribed verbatim and read multiple times. During the process of reading through the transcripts, free coding was done manually in a Microsoft word document. Here emotions, ideas and concepts relating to every narrative were written down. After free coding, the participant's experiential claims and objects of concern were identified and written down. After the coding process, emerging themes were identified and mapped out for each participant. After identifying the themes for each participant, cumulative patterns were identified across the various transcripts (Larkin & Thompson, 2012), In this case, even though there were common themes running through the various accounts, each account was analysed from the participants' specific context thus giving room for flexibility in data analysis (Brocki & Wearden, 2006). This procedure was able to carefully bring out the extent to which each participant's account was similar to or different from the other's experience. Finally, a structure of analysis was developed to bring together the various narratives in a meaningful manner. IPA has been widely used in the analysis of lived experienced

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because it has been found to be ‘a method that analyses data in an idiographic manner and which aims to explore the participants’ experiences, cognitions and meaning makings’ (Milton, 2004a, p. 118). It also must be noted that this method of investigation is not free from the biases of qualitative analysis.

In analysing the data of the teachers, Braun and Clarke’s, (2006) steps for thematic analysis were utilized. The process is briefly discussed as follows: First, the interviews were transcribed into written form in order to begin with the process of familiarizing with the data. After this, initial codes were generated in order to make the raw data assessable in a meaningful way in relation to the phenomenon. Coding was done manually using the Microsoft Excel sheet. After this stage, similar codes were grouped under sub themes and later on similar sub themes were grouped to form an overarching theme in a Microsoft Word document. After that stage the various themes were reviewed and refined to ensure that that themes are clearly defined and also that data under each theme cohere together meaningfully, and each theme is distinguished from the other Braun & Clarke, (2006). The themes were then defined and the data that each theme contained was further analysed. At this stage, the essence of each theme and the story that it told was captured. Finally, the results from defining the data was put together for the final discussion of this current research

3.8.3 Trustworthiness of findings

To ensure the validity and reliability of the data, the participants were contacted again with the interpreted quotes to check with them if the interpretations were as they meant them to be. In addition, another colleague, who has had experiences with child marriage and sexual abuse qualitative research was contacted to review the themes that had been proposed as well as their matching quotations. The goal here was to achieve a ‘validity which is established by the

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persuasiveness of grounding examples which is applied through an inspection of interpretation (rather than firm conclusions) of data' (Milton, 2004b, p. 287).

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CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS

The results section presents the descriptive data and qualitative analysis of the study. The descriptive results involved data from clinical diagnostic measures that assessed the victims' psychological distress and suicidal states. The qualitative results involved data from narratives of the victims with various supporting quotes.

4.1. Descriptive Results

The quantitative part of this study sought to provide a descriptive analysis on psychological distress states and suicidal behaviours of the incest victims in the Shai Osudoku district. The results of these descriptive statistics are found in Table 3 and Table 4 below. Table 5 further presents the specific levels of psychological distress and the suicidal behaviours of each of the victims.

The results in Table 3 represented the number of girls who were psychologically distressed. The results revealed that all the girls recorded being between mild and extremely or severely depressed, seven girls recorded being mildly to extremely or severely anxious and seven girls also reported being between mildly to extremely or severely stressed. This showed that incest victims were psychologically distressed about their predicament.

Table 3 Descriptive statistics for psychological distress

Variable	N
Depression	
Normal	0
Mild	1
Moderate	1
Severe	3

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Extremely severe	3
Total	8
Anxiety	
Normal	1
Mild	1
Moderate	1
Severe	1
Extremely severe	2
Total	8
Stress	
Normal	1
Mild	1
Moderate	1
Severe	1
Extremely severe	4
Total	8

The results represented in Table 4 represented the suicidal behaviour of the incest victims. From the table below, under suicidal ideation, four girls had no suicidal ideation, one reported having a suicidal plan and three reported having attempted suicide. In addition to this, four girls reported not having thoughts of suicide, one reported having rare thoughts of committing suicide, one girl reported having sometimes thought of committing suicide and one girl also thought of committing suicide often. Seven girls reported not talking to anyone about thinking about committing suicide and only one girl reported telling others about thinking of committing suicide. Finally, three girls reported they were never likely going to attempt suicide one day, one reported there was no chance she was going to commit suicide, and another stated it was unlikely she will commit suicide in the

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future. However, three of the girls reported that there was a likelihood of committing suicide in the future.

Table 4 Descriptive Statistics for suicidal behaviour

Variable	Frequency
Suicidal Ideation	
Non-suicidal subgroup	4
Suicidal plan	1
Suicide attempt	3
Total	8
Frequency of suicide attempt	
Never	4
rarely (1 time)	1
sometimes (2 times)	1
often (3-4 times)	1
very often (5 or more times)	1
Total	8
Threat of suicide	
1	7
3	1
Total	8
Likelihood of suicide	
Never	3
no chance at all	1
Unlikely	1
very likely	3
Total	8

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Table 5 Descriptive statistics for participants' psychological distress and suicidal behaviour

Participants	Psychological Distress			Suicidal behavior			
	Depression	*Anxiety*	*Stress*	*Suicide ideation*	*Frequency of behavior*	*Threat of suicidal attempt*	*Likelihood of future attempt*
P1	16 (mod)	24 (mod)	18 (mi)	No ideation	Never	No threat	Never
P2	28 (es)	22 (mod)	22 (s)	No ideation	Never	No threat	Never
P3	12 (mi)	6 (n)	16 (mod)	Suicidal attempt	Often	No threat	Very likely
P4	22 (s)	24 (mod)	16 (mod)	No ideation	Never	No threat	Very likely
P5	24 (es)	20 (mod)	28 (s)	Suicidal plan	Sometimes	No threat	Never
P6	10 (mi)	16 (mi)	14 (mi)	No ideation	Never	No threat	No chance at all
P7	38 (es)	32 (s)	28 (s)	Suicidal attempt	Very often	Future threat	Very likely
P8	42 (es)	36 (es)	42 (es)	Suicidal attempt	Rarely	No threat	Unlikely

*n-normal

*mi-mild

*mod- moderate

*s- severe

*extremely severe

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4.2 Qualitative Results

The aim of the qualitative study was to investigate the views of some stakeholders in the educational sector concerning the issue of incest and also explore the experiences of some incest victims in the community. The IPA method was used to generate main themes, themes and sub themes. The themes that were derived from the data analysis in connection with the aims of the study are presented in Table 3 below and discussed as follows:

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Table 6 A summary of qualitative themes derived from incest victims

Main Theme	Theme	Sub theme
Experiences of Incest victims	A) Subjective experiences of incest	• Exploiting opportunities • Trajectories of helplessness
Life after the act	A) Relationship with perpetrator after act	• Disrespect • Fear and avoidance • Hatred and enemyship
	B) Disclosure status	• Undisclosed to guardian/authority • Undisclosed to guardian/authority
	C) Action taken following disclosure	• Negative feedback • Endurance • No feedback
	D) Social Support following Disclosure	• Managing social damage • Temporal structural interventions, • Given advice • Engaging perpetrator
	E) Emotions following disclosure	• Disappointment • Helplessness and learned helplessness
	F) Reason assigned to act	• Payment for debts owed, • Punishment for supposed crimes Committed by another person • Their lifestyle • The perpetrator's bad behaviours • Smoking

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	G) Effect of the act	• Hostility • Loss of trust • Self-blame • Educational challenges • Change of old habits • Negative interpersonal problems • Experience of negative emotions • Getting Pregnancy
Self-harm and suicidal behaviours	A) Suicidal behaviours	• Attempted self-harm • Suicidal thoughts and acts
	B) Object used for suicide	• Use of Knife • Use of battery and rodent poison
	C) Reason for suicidal attempt	• A means of escape • Peace of mind
	D) Reason act was discontinued	• Religious teachings • Intrusion by another person
Coping strategies		• Emotional coping • Problem focused coping • Religious coping

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Table 5 A summary of qualitative themes derived from Key informants

Key informants' perspective	(A) Knowledge of incest in the community	• Has knowledge about the occurrence of the abuse
	(B) Action to be taken when incest was reported	• Verifying and following laid down protocol • Seeking family approval to take action • Investigating the case • Advising the victim on how to protect herself
	(C) Teachers' perception of Perpetrators	• Traditional or spiritual influence • Perceived mental illness.
	(D) Sanction for perpetrators	• Legal sanctions • Fine perpetrators • Castrate perpetrators
	(E) Willingness to help sanction perpetrators	• Willingness of victims to cooperate • Non efficient channels
	(F) Community values that promote sexual abuse	• Traditional norms
The role of School professionals	(A) Special progammes to interrupt incest	• Educational programmes • Gender clubs • Health centres that are children-friendly and protect privacy, • Parental educational programs
	(B) How equipped teachers' feel	• not well equipped • Teachers possess Good Skills
	(C) Barriers to help-seeking	• Fear and societal stigma • Unfavourable tradition • Underpowered non abusive parents • Unconducive facilities • No involvement in clinical care

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(D) How resources can be boosted	• Limited help offered by Ghana Education Service • Workshops and training • More infrastructure and learning materials • Appropriate personnel for guidance and counselling • School curricular improvement • Parental education • Personal research, NGO intervention

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4.2.1 Experiences of Incest Victims

A) Subjective experiences of incest

The narratives obtained the theme under subjective experiences of incest were classified under *exploiting opportunities* and *trajectories of helpless*. This theme reflects how the abuse occurred from the perspective of the victims.

Exploiting opportunities

The exploiting opportunities describe how the father figures in the lives of these victims explored and took advantage of several situations to exploit their daughters. From the narratives, the incest act was not one that they willingly partook in, for some victims, they were caught unawares in their bedroom by the perpetrator. Aside the bedroom, they were spied on when bathing, fondled when alone with the perpetrator, coerced and threatened by the perpetrator to withhold from them the care they offered to the girls as father figure, such as withholding pocket money, and not catering for their schooling. These occurrences, per narratives, made them powerless and helpless. One participant, in her narrative sadly recounted that her first experience was in her room where the perpetrator entered and began to inappropriately touch her. Inferring from the sad look on the girl's face and her inability to provide further detail of the moment, it was an experience that troubled her a lot. She said: *"When he came to the room, he was touching me…" (Esi, 16 years, one-time abuse)*

Another participant also recounted that she noticed that ever since the perpetrator conceived the idea of abusing her, he was always at home, even though his work was outside the community. According to her, she felt he stayed back because he was looking for an opportunity to abuse her. She also narrated: *"…initially he used to come home during the weekends only, on*

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*Saturdays. Ever since he conceived this idea, he is in the house all the time. Every day, he is in the house." (*Ama , *15 years, multiple abuse)*

Another participant also stated it all began when the perpetrator began to frequently check her vagina for infections as per the doctor's instructions even though she had never visited a doctor for anything relating to that. She however stated that she was very uncomfortable with the vaginal examination but kept quiet about it. Her narrative is as follows:

> *"First, he told me the doctors told him that now children are easily contracting white (candidiasis), so he wanted to check and see if we had had gotten candidiasis so that he will inform the doctor to prescribe some medication for us. Every day, he insisted on checking to see if we had contracted it because the doctor asked him to check, probably it will happen one day. Every day he did that, I was sceptical, I wasn't comfortable with it but I kept quiet and allowed him to do it. It went on for a while and I felt he was up to something." (Akua, 14 years, multiple abuse)*

Another girl's narrative suggested that her experiences began when the perpetrator began to peep at her any time she was taking her bath, an act she also disliked. She recounted: *"When I am in the bathhouse, he tries to stand behind the bathhouse and I told him I didn't like that" (*Ami, *15 years, one time abuse)*

Another account from a victim also suggested that the perpetrator attempted to lure her into the sexual act with gifts. She stated: *"He asked me to sleep with him so that he will buy me things" (Yaa, 13 years, one time abuse)*

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One girl also stated that the whole ordeal began when she realized in her sleep, she would feel that there was the presence of another in her room. She narrated: *"I was asleep and I realized something was heavy in my room" (Abena, 15 years, multiple abuse)*

One girl's narrative suggested that there were no warning signs, she only woke up one day to realize that she had been sexually abused. She recounted painfully: *"I went to bed (on my bed), then I woke up on his bed… I was sleeping naked... I experienced sharp pain in my abdomen" (Serwaa, 17 years, one time abuse)*

Trajectories of Helplessness

This theme examines how the victims became helpless and a culture of living in fear captured them. These experiences were shared by those whose experiences persisted after the first experience. The accounts that were gathered suggested that these girls felt helpless and unable to do anything to stop the act.

The account from one girl stated that she was helpless in her situation because even though she slept alone in her own room, she did not have the luxury of locking up her room in safety every night. The key to her room was kept by her father who locked it up and opened it as he willed. It was however noted that this girl gave her account of the story, skipping parts that were very sensitive such as narrating the ordeal she went through every night that her father let himself in on her. The extract below gives an account of this:

> *"When he comes, he has been touching me in a certain way that…but I don't shout because it is like, it is something that has never happened before, so I don't want to [shout]…, he locks it [her room] himself, so he has the key. …BECE is approaching …he said he wouldn't allow me to attend any secondary school that is not close to home" (Abena, 15 years, multiple abuse)*

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Another account from another participant revealed that she was also helplessly at the mercy of her perpetrator, who was constantly turning the mundane activities of her day into an opportunity to satisfy his sexual desires. She also was noted to skip the sensitive details of her account. The narrative below gives an account of this

> *"…he has been touching me, doing things I don't like. … The other time when I was sitting in his car then he was touching me...putting his hand in my dress… Now if I wake up and he hears the sound of the door, he wakes up too and comes inside the room. He will say go and bring me something from the top; go and bring me something from this place, sometimes I don't go. When I am going, he follows me, so by the time I am done taking it, he is already there." (Akua, 14 years, multiple abuse)*

Another also in reporting her various experiences, reported that there were many instances where the perpetrator made his intention clear and since she was helpless, there was little she could do to help herself and always lived in fear. Below is an account of how the girl's subsequent experiences are like:

> *"First he said, I am old enough to do what my mother can do. I asked him what he meant by that. He responded by saying I can wash and I can cook, when he said that, I didn't understand, but thinking about it, I think he meant something sexual. He told me that when he wanted to do something which I was not supposed to talk about. He asked me to wear revealing clothes so that whenever he felt like having me, he could. He said he didn't like the clothes I wear because they cover too much. That day I couldn't sleep (nervous laughter), I was there, I was afraid because that man, if I get anything, I will hit him... then he bought me panties and asked me to wear it for him to see, but I didn't. He said he wanted*

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to see if it fits me. He fought with me about it. Anytime I am going to bath, he walks in on me…" (Ama, 15 years, multiple abuse)

4.2.2 Life after the act

Themes that were derived under the main theme life after the act, sought to reflect how the lives of the participants became after experiencing the abuse and the actions they took. Sub-themes that were derived were relationship with perpetrator after act, disclosure status, reaction following disclosure, social support following disclosure, emotions following disclosure, reason assigned to act and the effect of the act.

(A) Relationship with perpetrator after act

This was explored to understand the emotions that the victims felt towards the perpetrators. The themes that were derived were *disrespect, fear and avoidance* and *hatred and enemeship*. These girls showed negative emotions towards the perpetrators of the act after the act had occurred as opposed to the positive emotions that they once felt towards the perpetrators of the act before the act happened. These are highlighted in their narratives below

Disrespect of perpetrator

The participant stated that the act led to her disrespecting the perpetrator which she shows through her actions. She stated that her actions led to her being punished but that did not serve as deterrent enough. The narratives below highlight this point:

"I sometimes disrespect him. It's like I have no respect for him again since he started it… I don't insult him but it is the way I behave towards him… he does not say anything, sometimes he will beat me." (Abena, 15 years, multiple abuse)

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"at first, we can…, when he asks me something, I can answer, but now when he asks me, even of my mother, I don't feel like answering him" (Yaa, 13 years, one time abuse)

Fear and Avoidance

Another theme that emerged was fear which was a unique description of a participant's experiences. This participant's narrative stated that due to the abuse, she was living in constant fear of him, which led to her avoiding him, an emotion which has been interpreted by the perpetrator as disrespect

"when he started that, I became afraid anytime I see him. My heart beats fast and, I don't want to go close to him, I used to have a good relationship with him. Now he tells my aunt that I don't respect him and I ignore him because I think I am of age." (Ama, 15 years, multiple abuse)

Hatred and Enemeship

Another participant also stated that after the act, she developed hatred for the perpetrator and disappointed at him because he was supposed to act as a father figure in her life after the death of her father, but instead, he disappointed her by acting the way he did. In addition to that, the fact that he was her sister's husband made her feel bad about. The quote below highlights this:

" if you touch me like that, you make me hate you, I will not like you again. I feel bad that my sister's husband is doing this, I feel bad when he is doing that because I never knew that, because when my father died, he said I should take him as my father, that was what he said to me. I was happy about it, but now he has become my enemy." (Akua, 14 years, multiple abuse)

(B) Disclosure status

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Disclosure is a very important component in helping understand the help seeking behaviours of incest victims. These girls were asked about their disclosure status and it came up that six of them had disclosed the abuse to their non perpetrating guardian, one had disclosed to a friend, whiles one had never disclosed to anyone but was disclosing for the first time during the interview. The sub themes that came up were *undisclosed to guardian/ authority* and *disclosed to guardian* and they are discussed as follows:

Undisclosed to guardian/authority

One participant stated that she had not disclosed the incident to anyone and that this was her first time of talking about the incident. She stated that her stepmother's attitude towards her was the main reason why she did not disclose the incident. This meant that she failed to disclose to her step mother because she felt she would not be believed. This phenomenon has been found to be common among sexual abuse victims who are nurtured in environments where there is little affection shown them or where they do not trust the adults around them. Her account was: *"At that time my stepmother was maltreating me. Everything I say, she will say I am lying" (Serwaa, 17 years, one time abuse)*

One girl also stated that she had not reported the incident to an adult because she feared that word will get out and her sister will get to know about it. She said she did not want to be tagged as the person who destroyed her sister's marriage, especially considering her sisters children, and as such has remained silent and is dealing with the ordeal by herself. However, she told her friend in school about it. The extract below accounts for this:

> *'I feel shy, I feel that if I tell someone, the person will tell another person, and it will get to my sister and my sister will call me a witch, she will say I came to her marriage to destroy the marriage. I don't want my sister's marriage to fail especially because of her children.*

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That is why I have not told anybody. …if I tell them, me, I don't trust people, because, you can say one thing to your close friend you trust, thinking that she would not tell anybody, but she can go and tell another person, then it will be spreading and my sister will hear it. My sister has many friends in Dodowa, she knows everybody" (Akua, 14 years, multiple abuse)

Disclosed to guardian

Another theme that came up from the girls was that of disclosure. Some of the girls also stated that they had reported the incident of abuse after it had occurred. Analysis of the narratives under the disclosure suggested that most of these girls did not keep these acts to themselves but instead, they reported them to people they felt could offer them protection. One girl stated that she initially did not want to disclose to anyone about the abuse because of the threats she received from the victim. But she later decided to open up to the people around her that she trusted without regard for the consequences. The narrative below illustrates this point:

"First, I wanted to give him the benefit of the doubt. I felt he didn't know what he was doing. He told me not to tell anyone, but when I remember the way he talks to me, something tells me to tell somebody so I told a sister [neighbour]. If I am on good terms with you, I really feel the urge to tell you. The lady, she lives behind our house, so one day when the thing happened, I told her. Initially, I thought I'd get into trouble because he told me that if I told anyone, he will sack me from the house. So, I made up my mind not to tell anybody, but as time went on, he was still doing the thing. I made up my mind to leave if he sacked me. Then he repeated the same thing. That was what forced me to tell somebody. I told my aunty too about it later too" (Ama, 15 years, multiple abuse)

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Other victims also stated that they told the non-perpetrating guardians about their abuse cases. From one girls account, she stated that she reported the perpetrator to her stepmother *"I reported him to my step mother" (Abena, 15 years, multiple abuse)*

Another girl also said she reported the incident to her mother: *"at that moment, I just went out of the room, I saw my mum fetching water, so I told her" (Yaa, 13 years, one time abuse)*

One girl also reported disclosing to her grandmother. She stated: *I told my grandmother" (Esi, 16 years, one time abuse)*

(C) Action taken following disclosure

The reaction of the guardian or trusted person to whom the girls reported the case to was explored. When these girls were asked about their views on how they perceived the reactions of the people they reported their cases to, majority of their responses suggested that those people whom they trusted enough to report their cases to either had negative responses or were unresponsive to these girls. The themes that were gathered were *negative feedback, endurance*, and *no feedback*

Negative feedback

For the girls who reported receiving negative feedback, they stated that after reporting the incident, they were met with disbelief. They stated that their guardians or the non-perpetrating parent whom they reported the incident said that since they had not seen the act with their own eyes, it meant they were lying about it. Below is an extract of her account of this:

but when I reported him to my step mother, none of them believed me, she said she didn't believe it because she (stepmother), hadn't seen it … I have reported a lot of times but she

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doesn't do anything, they make no case out of it; my two step mothers (Abena, 15 years, multiple abuse)

Another girl also stated that she was also met with disbelief until the perpetrator was caught red handed, her narrative below accounts for this:

"but I told my aunty what he…, everything he told me, I told her, but my aunty did not believe it. One day, she herself saw it. So, if I am going to bath, she would sit in the way because she doesn't want her husband to come and pass there, she will wait for me to finish bathing" (Ama, 15 years, multiple abuse)

Endurance

Another girl also stated that when she disclosed the incident to her mother, she was asked to ignore what was going on and endure it because her future was at stake since the perpetrator was the one solely taking care of her education. Her account of this is as follows:

"If I tell my mother, she will say that I should keep quiet over there and stay here till I grow up and become someone. The day that my mother said that, I knew that the whatever thing the man was doing, she was part" (Akua, 14 years, multiple abuse)

No feedback

Other girls also stated that when they disclosed the incident, there was no feedback given to them. According to one girl, she was told that confronting the perpetrator will be an embarrassing situation for him so there was nothing she could do about it. She reported,

"she said I shouldn't mind him and I said she should go and ask the person, and she said when I ask, he will be ashamed, so she will not ask, the person will be ashamed" (Esi, 16 years, one time abuse)

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Another girl also stated that she was not told anything, further stating that she felt that happened because they didn't want to remind her of the incident. Her account of this is as follows:

"She just told me it's ok, I should go back inside, she will talk to me (they didn't) - I think maybe they are just trying not to remind me of what happened" (Ami, 15 years, one time abuse)

(D) Social Support following Disclosure

After disclosure of the act, the actions taken by the ones they disclosed was explored to find out the kinds of help that these girls received to further protect themselves from going through such an experience again. The responses that were gathered showed that these girls did not receive enough help to prevent the reoccurrence of the act against them. The themes that were gathered were *managing social damage, temporal structural interventions, given advice* and *engaging perpetrator.* These themes are discussed as follows:

Managing social damage

One girl stated that after disclosing to her step mother, who said she did not believe her, she told a friend who told a teacher and the case was reported to the headmaster. When her family heard of this, they asked her not to pursue the case because it would bring disgrace to the family. She also stated that after speaking to her father's friend to help her out, her father, the perpetrator, met him with insults. When she told her grandmother too, she was asked to have patience and stay with him till she is done with school. The narrative below gives her account of this:

> *"They said they should stop that case because it is a disgrace to the family so they should stop it. My aunties came to say that the case is a disgrace to the family so the teachers should stop it. After that, nobody has said anything about it. When I told one of his friends too, that friend was advising him, he rather insulted him that he should mind his own*

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business. She can't do nothing about it (grandmother)… she wants me to finish school so she said I should have patience and stay with him" (Abena, 15 years, multiple abuse)

Temporal structural interventions

Other girls also stated that they were provided with temporal solutions which was supposed to prevent the perpetrator from having access to them to abuse them further. One girl reported that she was asked to move to her sister's room since she slept alone. She stated: *"she said I should change my room, [move to] my sister's room, so there was nothing that was done to him" (Esi, 16 years, one time abuse)*

Another girl also narrated that her aunt who was her guardian decided to guard her anytime she went to bath in a bid to prevent the perpetrator from having access to her in the bathroom. She stated that: *"… when I told my aunty about it, if I am going to bath, my aunty will come and sit there so that he wouldn't do that anymore" (*Ama*, 15 years, multiple abuse)*

Given advice

Another girl stated that when she told the Girl Child Coordinator about the abuse, she was given tips on how to protect herself so that the perpetrator would not have it easy to abuse her again. The extract below accounts for this:

"she [girl guide coordinator] say that I should take good care of myself, like if I am going to sleep, I should wear a lot of clothes, I should not go close to him. Then she said it is ok I should take good care of myself…"(Ama, 15 years, multiple abuse)

Engaging perpetrator

Other girls also stated that the perpetrator was called and spoken to. One girl's account was that she saw that the perpetrator was called and spoken to but did not know what was said to him,

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she narrated: *"my grandfather and my mum called him but I didn't know what they told him" (Ami, 15 years, one time abuse)*

Another girl said the perpetrator was told not to call or send her on errands anymore, she reported *"she just told him that he shouldn't call me or send me again" (Yaa, 13 years, one time abuse)*

(E) Emotions following disclosure

When asked how they felt about the actions that was taken after their disclosure, the girls stated that they had negative feelings after the action that was taken. The negative feelings that they reported were *disappointment, helplessness* and *learned helplessness*. These negative feelings as reported by the girls are discussed as follows:

Disappointment

One girl expressed disappointment in the way the case was handled, she preferred a harsher action but did not get that. She accounted that: *"I wanted my grandmother to disgrace him...yes, for doing that, or she should tell him that he shouldn't do that again" (Esi, 16 years, one time abuse)*

Helplessness

Another also demonstrated helplessness, this was evident in their wish to leave the house and not return anytime thoughts about the incident arose and the fact that nothing tangible had been done to help her out. The only help she stated having received was her aunt guarding the front of the bathhouse when she went to bath. An act which was inadequate to deal with recurrent abuse she was facing. Her narrative was thus: *"like maybe I should leave the house...eehh, when the thing happens, sometimes I feel like I should not do anything, I should just leave the place, I should go…" (Ama, 15 years, multiple abuse)*

Learned Helplessness

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Another girl also reported developing learned helplessness at her situation. In the narrative below, this 15 year old girl who had been abused several times by her father stated that she did not know who to turn to again for help. She stated this in light of the fact that she had reported the matter to various people but she was not offered any form of help.

"It is like now I don't have anyone to tell again. No one can do anything to him, so if I like, I report to anyone I like, he has no shame, so he doesn't care. I wasn't happy, but I had to stay because of my school. She has no money (grandmother), I don't want that but I don't have a choice that is why I am still there." (Abena, 15 years, multiple abuse)

(F) Reason assigned to act

This sought to explore what the girls' thought were the reasons why they became victims to this act. These themes that arose included *payment for debts owed, punishment for supposed crimes committed by another person, their lifestyle, smoking* and the *perpetrator's bad behaviours*

Payment for debts owed

The narratives under this theme suggested that the victims thought that whatever they were going through the act was as a form of payment. Here, these girls raised the issues bothering around the fact that they were going through this because the perpetrators felt they [victims] were indebted to them for caring for them. For one girl, the act was a form of payment to her aunt's husband who had adopted her after she lost both parents. She felt this was so because other relatives from the perpetrator's family had told her that she would have to marry their son whom she considered a brother. Her narrative is as follows:

"He said that if they use their money to look after me, when I am done [with school], they will give their son to me, my brother [stressing on brother] to me to marry me. They said they will give him to me to marry, as for this, her [aunty] husband's mother said it. They

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said after using money to take care of me, they will not leave me to go like that. They want to get profit from raising me. They won't let me go just like that" (Ama, 15 years, multiple abuse)

For another girl too, this act was a form of payment for the perpetrator adopting her after the death of her father and it was either she kept up with it or risked jeopardizing their future. She stated that: *"Because he said his money that he is using it take care of me, this is the only thing he want from me else he will not send me to secondary school" (Akua, 14 years, multiple abuse)*

Punishment for another's crimes

In addition to this, some girls also reported that they thought they were being abused because they were being punished for the crimes of others; mainly their mothers or mother figures. They saw themselves as the sacrificial lambs of crimes they did not commit or even knew nothing about. From the account of one girl who was adopted by her sister's husband after her father had died, it was noted that she felt she was being abused because of certain things her sister may have done to displease him. She narrated: *"I think my sister has been doing some things that he doesn't like so he wants to punish my sister and he is using me as the punishment." (Akua, 14 years, multiple abuse)*

Another girl, who was being abused by her biological father also recounted that she felt the abuse was as a result of offences her mother may have committed that may have resulted in they not getting married. She said this because her father never married her mother but married three other women, whose children he did not abuse.

"I don't know, I think, maybe, when he was dating my mother, maybe there was something that my mother did that is hurt him. The way he is treating me, that is not how he is treating the rest. He didn't get married to my mum" (Abena, 15 years, multiple abuse)

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Lifestyle

Another15 year old girl, who experienced the abuse once, perceived that she went through the abuse because of how she dressed at home. According to her narrative, she preferred dressing in ways that was not decent, because that was what she felt most comfortable in, an act which according to her, the perpetrator complained about. The narrative below accounts for this:

> *"Maybe because of the way I dress at home. It's not all the time that I put on things…I don't know how to explain it…like decent dresses, let me just put it like that. Sometimes I feel like I am sweating so I just need something that I feel I can get fresh air. And he has once told me that I should stop wearing the kind of dresses I wear" (Ami, 15 years, one time abuse)*

Perpetrator's bad behaviours

Another girl also in her simple words, attributed the act to the perpetrator's bad behaviour. According to this girl, the perpetrator had bad thoughts against her and that was what led him to abuse her. According to her, he abused her because of "his *bad thoughts" (Yaa, 13 years, one time abuse*)

Smoking

Another reason that was cited as the cause of the abuse was smoking. One girl stated that she felt in addition to other reasons that she was abused by her father because he smoked. She recounted: *"My father smokes, but I think he does that because he smokes" (Abena, 15 years, multiple abuse)*

(G)Effect of the act

The girls' perspective on the effect of the act was also explored. Most of the girls stated the act had a negative effect on them. The effects that they listed suggested that they were facing

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distress, included *hostility, loss of trust, self-blame, educational challenges, change of old habits, negative interpersonal problems, experience of negative emotions, pregnancy, self-harm and suicidal behaviors*.

Some girls reported that they had interpersonal problems. Analysis of their narratives revealed that, they had problems relating with others in the sense that, they experienced hostility towards males and also discomfort when interacting with others.

Hostility

One girl stated that she hated the perpetrator as well as became hostile towards any male who tried to touch her. She narrated:

> *"I said that because I hate him, I like playing with boys but those things do not cross my mind. If I am playing with you and you try touching me, I will not like to play with you, I will not like to talk to you, in such a way that I will not respect you. I will talk to you anyhow I like" (P3, 14 years, multiple abuse)*

Another girl also stated that she also did not like some males, she stated that: *"I don't like some of them [boys]" (Afua, 15 years, one time abuse)*

Another girl also stated that as a result of her ordeal, she did not have a lot of friends neither did she have a good relationship with her siblings at home. She also recounted *"[I don't have a lot of friends] no I don't have good relationships with them [sisters]" (Abena, 15 years, multiple abuse)*

Also, another girl stated that as a result of her experiences, she had no friends and had no intentions of getting a boyfriend and also preferred being alone. Her narrative is as follows: *"no, no, no, I don't like friends, no, I never had boyfriend, as for boyfriend, mtch mtch mtch, I have never thought*

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of having a boyfriend. I will rather stay alone than have a boyfriend." (Serwaa, 17 years, one time abuse)

Loss of trust

Also, another reported effect was loss of trust. Below is a narrative of a girl who was reported that she did not trust people again because of her experience. She stated that she trusted him at first, but since he started abusing her, she did not trust him any longer. This loss of trust according to her has been extended to everyone, thus, she trusts no one.

> *"I don't trust people, I feel like …, the thing is like, at first I trusted people more than I did now, but now because of what he has been doing, now I don't trust people again I am used to it, I don't trust anyone else. too I don't trust my mother again." (Akua, 14 years, multiple abuse)*

Educational challenges

Educational challenges were one of the effects that was raised by some girls. From the narratives, it was noted that the girls experienced a significant change in their studying patterns, indicating that the act was interfering in their normal study routine. One girl's account stated that anytime she woke up at dawn to study, the perpetrator also woke up and came to her room. This was seen as a very big challenge since the victim was coming from a background where the girl's day was occupied with chores and could only make time for herself at dawn to study. The intrusion of the perpetrator thus meant that she was not going to be able to have her personal study time, an act that was going to have detrimental effects on her academics. The extract below accounts for this:

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"truly it has affected my education, first, now I am not like how I was at first again, first I used to learn at 1am to 2am, now if I wake up and he hears the door, he too he wakes up and comes inside to my room." (Akua, 14 years, multiple abuse)

Also, from another girl's account, it was observed that her challenge in relation to academics was recurring flashbacks of her abuse experiences, anytime she was in the classroom or when she was studying. From this girl's account, it can be deduced that this may have an unfavourable effect on her academic performance. Her account of this is as follows:

"Sometimes, when teacher is teaching, memories of the abuse will flood my mind. The man will be talking, he will be saying a lot, he will be saying that the panty, he bought for me, the brassier, … it affects me, it affects me, if I am learning, especially if I am learning, it affects me, because I can't…, when I am studying, the memories come, it worries me so I put the book somewhere and go and sleep because, it affect us a lot" (Ama, 15 years, multiple abuse)

Another girl also stated that she also has flashbacks of the abuse during her study period and when that happens, she stops studying. She reported: *"I stop, I sleep or just sit, yeah" [it plays back in mind during studying periods] (Abena, 15 years, multiple abuse)*

Self-blame

Self-blame was another effect that came up. According to one girl, the incident has caused her to feel responsible for her parents' divorce. Her account for this is as follows:

"I feel I am the reason why my father left my mother. Or she doesn't like me, I don't know, I don't know how to put it, I remember the day my father came to take me away, since that day up to now, she did not follow up, see how we are doing, me and my sister, how we are

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faring or buy even pant or biscuit for us, we are his children so we should take or let us know that she is with us…. like I am the reason why she got divorced, I don't know, she doesn't like me, I don't know. Even now, she does not call, no giving money" (Serwaa, 17 years, one time abuse)

Change of old habits

It was also reported that the experience of abuse led to a change in old habits as stated by one girl. According to her narrative, she changed her habit of not wearing decent dresses, a habit she felt was the cause of her abuse, to wearing more decent clothing. She recounted: *"I was the type that will take of her school uniform and walk about, but now, I try to put on something, something decent" (Ami, 15 years, one time abuse)*

Another also stated that the incident stole from her the joy she derived from her usual play patterns. Her account of this is as follows:

"mmmm… I don't know how to put it, it has changed because I used to play with children that I grew up with, I used to enjoy taking care of them, but one day when I woke up, all of this was gone" (Serwaa, 17 years, one time abuse)

Experience of negative emotions

Other girls also reported heightened experiences of negative emotions such as anxiety, guilt, stress, anger and unhappiness.

One girl recounted that she was angry and as a result of that she did not want to talk to the perpetrator. She narrated: *"I feel angry, I do not even want to talk to him" (Esi, 16 years, one time abuse)*

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In addition to that, another girl also stated that she was also angry but at her mother. This may be as a result of her not taking any action to save her from the situation. She reported: *"I am angry with my mother" (Akua, 14 years, multiple abuse*)

Another negative emotion that was reported was that of unhappiness. Here, one girl reported that as compared to how she felt prior to the onset of the abuse, she was unhappier now. She stated: *"First I was a happier person, but now I am not happy" (Akua, 14 years, multiple abuse)*

Another girl, stated that she felt unhappy anytime she remembered that she had committed an abortion. She narrated that this was because even though she did not know an abortion was being committed, she felt guilty because she felt it was a sin against God. She also felt anxious because she had heard about the negative effects of an abortion and felt that this may have been her only child. She recounted:

> *Since then, I have been crying, up till date, if I remember, I feel like I have sinned against God, I feel maybe that could have been my only child, it makes me feel anxious" (Abena, 15 years, multiple abuse)*

Another girl also stated that when she was younger, she was happy, but after she moved to stay with her father and her stepmother, a period which also marked the start of her abuses, she has never been happy. She stated that this feeling resulted in her feeling stressed and having high blood pressure all the time. She recounted*:*

> *"I was a happy child, yes, after my father took me away from her [my mother], I have never been happy (starts to cry), I feel stressed, a lot of stress, my bp [blood pressure] is always high" (Serwaa, 17 years, one time abuse)*
>
> ***Pregnancy***

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Pregnancy was also one of the effects that one girl stated as an effect of the act. According to her, when she suspected she was pregnant she reported to her father, the perpetrator, who in turn had the pregnancy aborted the pregnancy without her knowledge. She stated that the abortion procedure scared her a lot but she received no support from them.

> *"When I told my father, he said it could happen that way, and I don't know if my step mother and father connived. They took me to a woman down there, they claim she was a nurse, they spoke with her and they said there was a blood clot in my abdomen and that they wanted medication to bring it out. So they gave me a certain drug. When I went to bed, my tummy was really aching, after a while, I saw that there was blood coming out of me and my abdomen was heavy, so I got up and went to the bathroom. When I got there I squatted and I realized there was something like a baby coming out of me. I was very scared, and I was crying because I hadn't seen that before. I managed to push the baby out. I felt very ashamed and I didn't want anyone to know but I called my father to come and see what the drug had caused. He told me it wasn't anything and he took the thing away." (Abena, 15 years, multiple abuse)*

4.2.3 Self-harm and Suicidal behaviours

Suicide and self-harm have been reported to be one of the most devastating effects of incest. This was explored to find out from girls who had attempted either, the reasons why they attempted it, how they attempted to carry it out and why they stopped or what made the act unsuccessful. The themes that were gathered here were: self-harm, suicidal behaviours, reason for suicidal attempt, object used for suicide and the reason act was discontinued.

(A) Suicidal Behaviours

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Three girls out of the eight stated that they had attempted suicide, one girl stated that she had self-harmed before and another one stated she had thoughts of self-harming. It was also observed that these were mostly girls who had suffered recurrent abuses as compared to others whose abuse experience was once. The narratives gathered here were classified under *attempted self-harm* and *suicidal thoughts and acts*

Attempted self-harm

The responses recorded suggested that self-harm was less popular among these girls as one girl had thoughts of attempting self-harm and another girl stating that she had attempted it. From the narrative of the girl who reported that she had attempted self-harm, it was observed that the thought of her abusive experience brought about negative emotions. These emotions on one occasion drove her to hit her hand against an iron sheet, an object which under normal circumstances is avoided by many due to its ability to cause harm if not handled properly.

> *"Yes, I was sweeping the kitchen, then the thing come into my mind, and I use my hand to hit the iron sheet and it cut me here. A lot of blood came out. I was afraid, because anytime I remember it, I get this bad feeling, like something bad is happening to me". (Ama, 15 years, multiple abuse)*

One girl also stated that she had thought of cutting herself with a knife but had never actually attempted it. She stated that: *"I have thought of cutting myself" (Afua, 15 years, one time abuse)*

Suicidal thoughts and acts

On the thoughts and attempts of suicide, the girls were asked how frequently they thought about engaging in suicide, their responses suggested that it was something they thought about many times.

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For one girl, it was anytime she was left alone with the perpetrator. Her account is as follows: "*Sometimes I feel like killing myself, if my sister and her children are not around, and I am left alone with that man, and there is no one in the house" (Akua, 14 years, multiple abuse)*

For another girl, it was something she thought of very often which even rolled off her tongue most times. *She stated: "It is something I usually say, I either tell myself or someone, a lot of times" (Abena, 15 years, multiple abuse)*

For another too, she had thoughts of committing suicide once, but she her feeling of hope for the future gave her a change of mind. She stated that: *"only once it came in my mind, after that day…I know one day I will have something to live for" (Esi, 16 years, one time abuse)*

(A) Object used for suicide

In exploring the objects used for attempting suicide, it emerged that most of these were items found in most households on a regular basis. These girls stated that they used a *knife, battery* and *rodent poison.*

Use of Knife

From the account of one girl, the object she used in an attempt to kill herself was a knife. In her response, which was difficult for her to give, she briefly stated that: *"I use knife" (Akua, 14 years, multiple abuse)*

A second girl's account showed that she also attempted taking her life with a knife, she gave a brief detail about how exactly she had intended to carry out the act which was by slitting her throat with the knife. She stated: *"I went and picked knife to try to cut my throat off" (Serwaa, 17 years, one time abuse)*

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Use of Battery and rodent poison

In addition, another victim, stated that she attempted ingesting poisonous substances on two occasions when she felt she really wanted to take her life. She mentioned that: *"…battery, the black thing inside, I grinded it and put it in a bottle, I wanted to drink it. [Another time] I mixed my food with rat poison" (Abena, 15 years, multiple abuse)*

(B) Reason for suicidal attempt

Asking for the reasons why they thought of suicide, the girls gave narratives suggesting that suicide for them was *a means of escape* and also the only way they could enjoy their *peace of mind*.

Means of escape

As a means of escape, one girl stated that anytime she went through distress and did not find a solution to it, suicide was what she felt was the best way to get away from all the distress she was facing was to kill herself. Draw the attention of others to the distress she was going through. The narrative below gives an account of this:

> *"I wanted to kill myself because me if something is worrying me and I tell you and you still do it, I will do anything like…, so I wanted to kill myself. I think that for me to live, for this man to sleep with me…It is better I kill myself." (Akua, 14 years, multiple abuse)*

In addition, the girls also stated that dying was one way they were sure of having their peace of mind and getting away from the abuse that they were going through. To these girls dying was a better option to getting abused, dying was an option because they were not getting the needed help.

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"When it happened, [pregnancy] I mixed my food with rat poison, I will have my peace of mind when I die… I have told everyone and no one is helping me so I don't know what to do again" (Serwaa, 17 years, one time abuse)

"I feel like when I am there he will come and, he will force me or do something bad to me I don't like so I feel like I should kill myself, is better than the one I will live for him to do what he is doing", (Akua, 14 years, multiple abuse)

(C) Reason act was discontinued

These girls stated that the act was discontinued because there was either *intrusion* or they were prompted by *religious teachings* which admonished one not to take their own life.

Intrusion

For one girl, she quit the attempt because someone else was come to where she was hiding to commit the act. She recounted: *"that day someone was coming" (Abena, 15 years, multiple abuse)*

Religious teachings

Under this theme, analysis of the girls' responses showed that they discontinued the act because of religious teachings that admonishes followers not to take their own lives. From the narrative of one girl, in the process of attempting to take her life, she remembered that taking one's life was against her religion and prompted her to stop. She stated: *"I remembered that we are not supposed to kill ourselves" (Abena, 15 years, multiple abuse)*

A second girl also said that even though she was angry with herself and regretted her existence, she did not want to take her life because God would not forgive her if she did. Her account is as follows:

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"if I kill myself, I kill myself out of nothing, I don't know how I feel sometimes, I don't know what to say. But I know I feel angry with myself. I feel that I have regret for coming into this world … but I know I have something to live for so when I do it God will never forgive me" (Serwaa, 17 years, one time abuse)

4.2.4 Coping strategies

Coping strategies were explored as a means of knowing more about how these victims dealt with non-disclosure of the act or the lack of punitive action for the perpetrator even after reporting the case. The themes that were derived from this were grouped into *religious coping*, *emotional coping* and *problem focused coping*.

Religious coping

Religious coping emerged as one of the coping mechanisms that these girls used. Prayer was the main tool that was employed here. It was observed that those who resorted to this form of coping were those who faced recurrent abuse experiences, had self-harmed and had suicidal behaviors. The content of their prayer is one of liberation from their current ordeal.

In one account, the victim's narrative suggested that she prayed to God for liberation and protection and for the ability to resist the perpetrator anytime he made advances towards her. Her account of this is as follows:

"I pray about it, that God should help me, and take me out of this situation, he should help me, he should protect me, that he should not let me give myself to this man, when the man wants to come and do this he should give me strength so that I will take myself out of this" (Ama, 15 years, multiple abuse)

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Also, in another account under this theme, the victim reported that she sought answers from God during prayer. She felt she was she would have not been going through this ordeal if her biological father was alive. She also expressed the desire to join her dead father wherever he was in order to be liberated from her stepfather. Her account is as follows:

> *"I have been praying that if God knows how I feel, if he knows how I feel, how this is worrying me, then why won't he come and set me free from this man? Sometimes too I say that if my real father was alive, I wouldn't have been in this trouble, I don't want to stay there again, so my father should come and take me away. Sometimes too, I ask God why he took my father away from me" (Akua, 14 years, multiple abuse)*

Another victim's prayer was centered on finding someone else who would take care of her in order for her to break free from the perpetrator who was her father. She recounted:

> *I pray that God sends me someone who can take care of me … so that afterwards I would go back to live with my grandmother, God will make a way and I will take care of myself if even she can't. (Abena, 15 years, multiple abuse)*

Finally, another girl stated that she prayed to God for forgiveness of any sin that she may have committed that has led to her unfortunate experiences of sexual abuse by her father. She recounted: *"my prayer is God should forgive me [for any sin that merited the abuse] and help me forget about it" (Serwaa, 17 years, one time abuse)*

Emotion focused coping

Another coping mechanism that emerged was the emotion focused coping mechanism, where the girls reported in engaging in various activities with the aim of relieving themselves off the negative emotions that came with memories of their experiences.

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Distraction was one form of emotion focused coping that came up. By this, the girls reported engaging in activities such as reading, and trying to talk themselves into forgetting. From the narrative of one girl, reading story books gave her joy so anytime she had memories of the incident, she read and she felt happy. Her account is as follows:

> *"eeh, if I am there and I remember the thing, I have some story books, so if I am there and I remember that, I will go and take that story book and read it, then that thing will go, then I will be happy" (Ama, 15 years, multiple abuse)*

Another girl also stated that talking to herself usually telling herself positive things was the technique she used to alleviate the negative emotions that came with the memories of her ordeal. She narrated; *"Sometimes I will forget, sometimes when I remember I talk to myself [tell myself positive things]" (Serwaa, 17 years, one time abuse)*

Others also used disclosure as a means of riding themselves off the negative emotions. Two girls said talking about it to other people worked very well for them in reducing the negative emotions that they felt anytime they remembered their ordeal. One stated that: *"…my friend and I, we play together, I told her, then she said I should forget about it" (Yaa, 13 years, one time abuse)* whiles another also said: *"then I feel free, if I talk about it , is not in my mind again (talking about it)" (Ama, 15 years, multiple abuse)*

In addition, one girl stated that she resorted to aggression as a means of getting over the memories of the incident. Below is her account:

> *"I shout, sometimes when someone annoys me I deal with the person, as for fighting, I fight a lot, I don't tolerate nonsense, even my sister, I am always beating her, aahh, she is my*

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older sister but she cannot…, I get angry, when someone talks to me, I take my anger on the person" (Serwaa, 17 years, one time abuse)

Positive Reframing

It was observed that one girl however, stated that she tried to let go of all that happened to her. She narrated: *"I just told myself that it is ok, and let go of everything" (Ami, 15 years, one time abuse)*

Problem focused coping

Under this theme, girls stated that they used measures that sought to address the problem itself in a bid to stop the problem from occurring again. Here, one girl stated she tried to cover up herself even more.

"He will check, if I am errr, if I have finished bathing and about to pomade myself, then he will come. Ever since I realized that was the trend, when I am going to bath, I take my pant, my brassier, my underwear, vest, everything, and then I will send it to the bathroom. Then after everything I will dress then come, I will wear the dress, then I will just pomade myself [in the bathroom]" (Ama, 15 years, multiple abuse)

Another girl stated she resorted to physical aggression against the perpetrator, she reported: *"I was on the bed in the night, my brothers were asleep. It was in the midnight so I didn't want to shout. So I kept quiet and I slapped him" (Yaa, 13 years, one time abuse)*

4.2.5 Key Informants' Perspective

Stakeholders in GES were engaged to find out their knowledge about the incestuous act in the community, how they assist the victims of this abuse and the barriers that limit the services they offer to the victims. The themes that were derived from the analysis of their accounts are as

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follows: knowledge of incest in the community, action to be taken/took when incest is/was reported, sanction for perpetrators, perception of Perpetrators, willingness to help sanction perpetrator, values that promote sexual abuse in the community, special programs to interrupt incest, how equipped they feel, barriers to help-seeking and how resources can be boosted.

(A) Knowledge of incest in the community

Responses that were gathered under this theme reflected that most teachers were *knowledgeable* about the occurrence of the act and knew some of the victims personally.

Has Knowledge of the abuse occurrence

Probes revealed that the teachers had knowledge about the abuse in their schools and even those who did not know of any victim of incest in their current school, knew someone who had been a victim, either from the previous school they taught in or from the community. This is accounted for in the extracts below:

> *"…something like that happened. He is not the biological father; he is the stepfather. The stepfather was taking advantage of her, even the child got pregnant. Quickly what I learnt what they did was they took the child away and aborted the baby. Something like that is very very serious" (T1).*
>
> *"The school? No, but my former school. At times if you have one-on-one contact with them, if you interview them, we will see that some of them face these challenges. They are not open. At times you have to take time, some you hear from your colleagues. If something happens like that, take time, take the person as your friend, so that as time goes on, if you are ask them they are able to tell you" (T9)*

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"We per chance had a girl in one of the school who had to share her ordeal with us, for 4 hours we had to psyche her before she could break the news to us for being sexually abused by the person she is staying with." (T4)

(B) Action to be taken when incest was reported

In order to explore how the channel of reporting cases such as incest worked, teachers were asked what action they would take when they were faced with a case of incest if they were to have such a case on their hands, if they already had not experienced such. For those who had dealt with such a case, they were asked what actions they took to address the issue and how far it went. Responses that were gathered, when analyzed, suggested that the teachers were very limited in the extent of help they could give these victims. With factors such as family interference and the willingness of the victim to cooperate greatly affecting their ability to even start offering help. The themes that were gathered under were: *verifying and following laid down protocol, seeking family approval and investigating the case,* and *advising the victim on how to protect herself*. They are discussed as follows:

Verify and follow laid down protocol

Teachers who stated this were of the view that sometimes students may not be truthful, and so it was necessary that they verified if the information they had received was true before they took the next step. The next step according to them was to report the matter to the headmaster/mistress since the laid down protocol insisted that they did that. The matter after being reported to the head was supposed to be forwarded to the district coordinators to handle if the matter was seen to be very serious. The extracts below give an account of this assertion:

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"That is the first thing, and the student, I will find out if it is true. Because some of the children too they can lie, if it is true, the first step is go to the head, you can't take the law in your hand Guidance and counselling is a secret thing, but this is beyond me... it means that the child doesn't like the thing that is why the child is telling you. So, you have to go to the head and the head will also invite the guidance and counselling madam from our district." (T1)

"I can't just get up and then go there and start fighting them and calling police or other things. I need to take my time to make proper investigations. After I have gathered all the information, I will send channel it to the education office for them to take it up from there. Mine is the child will report the information to me, gather all the information and then channel it to the right authority and they will take it up from there. They need my help in any way in tackling or handling the issue, I will be ever ready to help them" (T4)

"The case of incest, I think that we will involve the school counsellor, we will involve the district counsellor, the district counsellor is well trained, she will advise us and move to the next step". (T8)

Seek family approval and investigate the case

Another factor that came up as one which should be considered before any action taken was the family of the victim. The family was seen as the unit that could promote or hinder the successful handling of the case. The victim was seen a member of the family unit even though it was this same unit that was harming the victim. As such, further action was only going to be taken when the family agreed to it. In that sense, if the family felt that the case would bring shame to its name, the case was not likely to go far. If the perpetrator of the act was also the breadwinner of the family, where other members were not employed or gainfully earning, there was also the

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possibility that the case would not be pursued. Most of these teachers in their narratives spoke making references to previous cases that they had encountered.

> *"At times the parents may not also want you to send it out, it is another issue, they don't want the thing to go out so that people will know. So they make it family issue and they settle it but for some time now I have not seen anything." (T5)*
>
> *"By all means we have to contact the family, close family. Then we discuss the issue, it must be a collaboration. It cannot be a school affair. It is a family affair too, so we have to come together and find a solution to it…, because at the end of the day, the child is still in the family, she belongs to the family and if you make the thing police case, for all you know the person perpetrated the act is the breadwinner of the family and the person is arrested. When school is involved and family members are unwilling to persecute, then we are also limited in a way," (T8)*

Another teacher was of the view that before an action could be taken, it should be confirmed that she had no role to play in the act. Such that if she was constantly asking for favors from the perpetrator, or visiting the perpetrator in his room, then the blame was not going to be solely put on the man and this could affect the outcome of the situation. The extract below sheds more light on this assertion:

> *"first thing is to investigate, maybe you advise the person, you ask the person where the thing happened, it can happen that the person is in the room, you have been going to the person. Or every time you see the person, I want this I want that, so you can find the source of what happened. You have to investigate" (T9)*
>
> ***Advice victim on how to protect herself***

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Also, another teacher stated that apart from reporting the matter to the right quarters, there was the need to advice the victim on how to protect herself. This will include very practical things when living and sleeping arrangements among other factors were considered. This was taken from the context of a teacher who had handled an incest case. The following narrative asserts this:

> *"I advised the child that anytime the person comes then she should make sure she draws the attention of others around her or she should shout or something for help. But if she is in her own room, she should make sure her door is always locked before she sleeps. When she is sleeping and somebody knocks at the door she shouldn't open. She should make sure when she sleeps, she puts on trousers or things that will protect her but if she sleeps naked without putting on these things, the person will get easy access but when you have all these things on, the person will struggle with you." (T4)*

(C) Teachers' perception of Perpetrators

The reactions of the teacher towards the perpetrators was explored to know more about how they felt about perpetrators of such crimes. Many differing opinions came up however, most of these views seemed to give the perpetrator the benefit of the doubt. The themes that came up were considering *traditional or spiritual influence*, and *perceived mental illness*. They are discussed below:

Traditional or spiritual influence

First of all, some participants were of the view that there was the need to consider tradition or spiritual reasons before forming any negative impression of the perpetrator of the act. If tradition permitted such an act to happen, then there was no need to go any further. And if it was as a result of a spiritual manipulation then it was out of the control of man.

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"I cannot just judge, so I found out from the child, and even the parents, to know about their traditions, if the tradition accepts it, then sometimes, you can't do anything about it. You have to teach the girl to make a decision whether to continue or to report" (T3)

"Yes one could be ritual, this is what the oracle is demanding, that you go and sleep your sister or brother or blah blah blah and one too could be spiritual forces, oh yeah, you'll be there and something will tell you go and do it, go and do it" (T8)

Perceived mental illness

There were however other who thought that it was abnormal for an individual to do that. According to them, the act may be as a result of the individual suffering from some form of psychological illness, had a lack of self-discipline or may be performing the rituals of an oracle. The extract below gives an account for this:

"For me it is attitudinal, people on able to control their libido, it is attitude. For me it doesn't make sense for someone to…, in the natural state go and have incest." (T8)

"I don't see why you should rape your own daughter. What do you see in her? At times too I think it is a psychological problem because you can't just get up and do that because they are women. Even if you are fed up with your wife there are women." (T5)

(D) Sanction for perpetrators

Incest, in the Ghanaian context, is a punishable offence both culturally and legally even though most people choose to remain silent over the reporting the issue. However, this does not prevent them from having views as to which sanctions, they deem most appropriate for perpetrators. In exploring the sanctions that these key informants' thought was most appropriate for the,

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perpetrators of incest, the themes that emerged were *legal sanctions, fine perpetrators,* and *castrate perpetrators*.

Legal Sanctions

With regards to legal sanctions, imprisonment was mainly suggested as the most appropriate sanction for the perpetrators of incest, even though some came with conditions suggesting that in meting out punishments, the family system was to come.

> *"then the law should deal with them they should be imprisoned because if maybe, that child has other siblings, who knows maybe he might be doing it to the other siblings" (T2)*
>
> *"I think the best, the only sanction that is good for such people is to prosecute them and jail them. I think when they go there and they come back they will learn from that" (T7)*
>
> *"You have to jail the man. At least if it is not life imprisonment, because they will also take care of the child" (T1)*
>
> *"Then they must also have a feel of prison for some time, yes so that next time when they come it will inform their brain to think wisely" (T8)*

Other views were not specific but rather open to whatever appropriate sanction that the authorities thought was appropriate for them. The following are quotes to highlight this

> *"I think when they are handed to the right authority, they will find the right sanction for them. The befitting sanction that will cater for that particular kind of thing" (T4)*
>
> *"We need to put appropriate measures to prevent others from doing same, maybe it might also be the same incest or a different one." (T3)*

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However, some were also of the view that the legal sanctions that were to be meted out should be done only on certain conditions. In the narrative below, the condition for imprisonment for a perpetrator should be implemented for second time offenders, implying that first time offenders could be let of the hook. Below is a narrative highlighting this:

> *"For a second timer, third timer or whatever, we will just have to hand the situation over to DOVVSU. They will know how to handle it better so that, is he has to suffer a jail term the go ahead with it. But for a first timer I will just handle it on a very low note" (T6)*
>
> *"We have human rights courts, you can take the person to that place, depending on the one involved" (T9)*

Another condition that was listed was that the perpetrator could be punished if the mother of the child was capable of taking care of the girl adequately. In this case the economic state of the family, especially the other parent comes to play. In cases where the offender is the sole provider of the home, third parties may be reluctant to offer the perpetrator up for punishment. The narrative below sheds more light on this.

> *"You see, we are blacks, at times you say the person should go to jail, who is there to take care of that same girl they've raped, you understand? At times the mother is not there, so if the father who did that goes to jail, it is left with the girl. If maybe the girl is having a mother who can take care of her, to me, they should put the man behind bars so that other men will also learn." (T5)*

Also, another condition for punishment that was raised was whether or not the victim was responsible for leading the perpetrator on and on how the perpetrator presented his side of the story. In this instance, if the perpetrator provides compelling evidence suggesting that the victim

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had a role to play in seducing him, then little or no punishment was going to be meted out to the perpetrator. The quote below illustrates this point further:

> *"This issue, we have to address it very well, the first thing, you have to find out why the person is doing that. You will see that the couple themselves, they are not together, how you are looking succulent and succulent, and your daddy is seeing you…, men, they are something. They can easily do that if you are exposing yourself to your daddy, some men they can't control. We have to find out whether the man also is temptation. Depend on the way the man will present his case" (T1)*

Castrate perpetrators

Another punishment that was raised was castration, even though not a popular view, one participant stated that there should be instant justice for the victims of incest and as such castration would be the most appropriate. The teacher stated: *"But I wish they would be castrated; I wish instant justice they should be castrated" (T2)*

In addition, counselling as a form of sanction was also raised especially for first time offenders. Counselling was believed to have an emotional effect on the perpetrators and as such appealing to their conscience, which in turn was going deter them from further committing the crime because of the shame that they would be feeling. However, counselling was recommended for those who were seen to be respectable. The narrative below further throws light on this

> *"I think the degree of the case will determine it, sanctioning the person may vary from, from, I don't know how to put it for there to be understanding. I think at the initial stage if it is just the first time, somebody commits the offence for the first time, sanctioning can be in the form of letting the person face a counsel, or be counselled in the presence of the life partner, because that alone will send a very striking emotional effect because, is that is*

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done they will say that my wife knows about this thing. I need to save myself from this sort of shame. You see, if the man is so stubborn that will not work for him. What a very respectable man one who thinks very deeply I think it will be enough" (T6)

Fine perpetrators

Fining of perpetrators was also another form of sanction that was deemed appropriate. This fine was supposed to act as a form of compensation for the victims of the act to serve as a deterrent to others and also to satisfy traditional demands.

"For incest, I think those people should, you think I am coming to say castrated, hahaha, they must be reformed. They must pay some fine, yeah it will sort of, you know in our local this thing, when you offend somebody you compensate the person. So the compensation comes to the victim" (T8)

"They should be given the highest fine, of course the fine will be given to the child, yes so that it will so that it will be a lesson to others" (T10)

(E) Willingness to help sanction perpetrator

Even though most of the teachers were of the view that perpetrators should be sanctioned and were willing to help in bringing the perpetrator to book, they had a few challenges or obstacles trying to help these young adolescents get justice. There were varying conditions that were stated by these teachers as precursors for them to be able to help these victims, and in some cases certain extents to which they could offer their help. Most of them stated that they will be able to offer help under conditions such as the *willingness of victims to cooperate* but they were limited due to *non-efficient channels*. These themes are discussed as follows:

Willingness of victims to cooperate

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Under this theme, the responses here suggested that there was the willingness to help the victims to sanction the perpetrator if only the victim was ready to cooperate with the teacher. They further added that in instances where victims were being threatened, steps to curb the situation could mean putting the life of the victim at risk. The excerpts from narratives presented below shed more light on this situation:

> *"it all depends if the daughter will admit it. If the child is willing to give you the information, you can do your best and advice the child. If the child doesn't give out the actual information on the ground, then you can't go all out. I will say, there was one experience we were having in the school. Me approaching the child, the child told me that something like that has not happened. She was telling me that it had not happened, but the mates she confided in, said it was something that has been happening but she wouldn't tell me the truth. I think that later, we got to know everything about it. But her fear was that, there is this, let me say warning or threat, should you open up to anybody, I will kill you. It came to a time we had to withdraw, because should the child lose her life, you the teacher will be in trouble. I think we went to the extent of reporting to the district Guidance and Counselling Coordinator, but we left it there" (T3)*

Non-efficient channels

Others also stated that the channel of protocol that they were supposed to follow was the main barrier to demanding justice for the victims of incest. According to them, their duty as Girl Child Coordinators and Guidance and Counselling Coordinators did not extend to reporting the matter to the appropriate legal quarters. Their role demanded that they report such situations to the headmaster who in turn was to report the matter to the district education coordinators. This

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structure however limited them greatly whenever they made an attempt to help the victims demand justice for the abuse they had suffered. The extract below highlights this situation

> *"Maybe see the head because everything is to go to the head. If there is the need that we should call the man and maybe talk to the man, at times you are talking to the man and the man is not giving you that chance, then you see that you must go even further. Then you can go to your boss because we do things under them. You can't just get up and go to the police station so you do things under. If the head, the head can tell you maybe let us call the parents and also listen to the person side, then from the person you will take something from." (T5)*

Despite all of these challenges, some of these teachers were willing to go all out to help victims if they approached them for help based on the fact that they felt that the victim had confidence in them, thus their willingness to open up to them. The quote below accounts for this:

> *"Yes, yes so far as the child came to me to come and report support whatever it is to me, it means the child feel secured in my hands and the child has some form of confidence in me. The child cannot just get up and go to anybody, so coming to me alone, it means he or she has some respect or confidence in me, So it has to take me all that I have to take up the issue I will do that" (T4)*

(F) Community values that promote sexual abuse

Here, the existence of certain values that may subtly or obviously promote sexual abuse in the community was explored. Responses revealed that certain *traditional norms* may have contributed to this phenomenon.

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Traditional norms

It was revealed by the officials that the puberty rites which ushered one into adulthood as well as certain traditional proverbs may have deep roots in the occurrence of such abuses. Below are their accounts of this:

> *"Their dipo rites and the rest. You know this area is the shai, they promote value such as keeping yourself until you get to the puberty rites" (District Coordinator 1)*
>
> *"Then I will say that the general adage that a child must be seen not heard, ahaa, so if the child even wants to go and say, what is your proof? What is your proof? The perpetrators hide behind these things. There is no proof, so what shows that he did it? No evidence to show, that is why I think for the girls own that man will be very careful because the girl can say that I did this on the man's thighs. So if they should investigate, per what our cultural issues tell us, that a child is supposed to be seen not heard, that is why the people are also hiding behind these things whatever they doing" (T12)*

4.2.6 The Role of School Professionals

A) Special programs to curb incest

Under this theme, the existence of programs in the community especially in the schools that aided in reducing or stopping the incestuous abuse in the community were explored. The results showed that certain programs were in existence. The themes that were gathered were: *educational programs, gender clubs, health centres that are children-friendly and protect privacy, parental educational programs.* These themes are discussed as follows:

Educational programs

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It was also revealed that there were no special programs designed to prevent children from being abused by their family. There were however programs designed to sensitize children on ways to prevent sexual abuse.

> *"not on incest, not on incest but on comprehensive sexuality. Sexual education with the appropriate age of the children, so we start from kg. We normally sensitize the children from kg, even when someone touches you and you don't like it is a harassment, you don't have to allow somebody to touch you. We have the underwear rule that anything that is under your clothes should be private. Nobody has to see it whether you are a boy or a girl, ahaaa and this underwear rule is being disseminated for all the pre tertiary school from kg to shs" (T11)*
>
> *"oh all other kinds of abuse. It's a holistic thing. We talk about academic issues, career issues, and we use some of these things, even when we are talking about career issues. We use sexual issues to put into it, or as part of it because we realize that you can only achieve your purpose in life if you devoid yourself of negative activities. The unfortunate thing that happens, that you are raped and you are pregnant, pregnancy can even make you become a drop-out, especially when the family do not accept you well and handle you, these are some of the things, the activities and these general things that we do or something that we handle. Any other, we chip in these sexual issues" (T 112)*

Gender Clubs

The officials also stated that there were gender clubs in schools with facilitators that sought to empower the girls. These clubs were there to educate girls on their rights, how to defend and protect themselves and the various channel available to address abuse cases. Below are their narratives:

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"We have clubs and societies, girl clubs, gender clubs if I should put it… we have gender clubs in the schools and we have school-based facilitators. For such clubs to educate them on their rights as children and their responsibilities to, And referral places for abuse too" (T11)

"at the school level they do, and we also as field officers, we also go round, we talk about reproductive health issues and also sexual issues, the consequences that are involved and the legal implications. self-defence, defending themselves against any sexual issues." (T12)

" Sometimes we invite DOVVSU to also come and share their sentiments as well as CHRAJ, Work with them as well as social welfare, NCCE, And we even invite fire service to tell us what to do So that we can be conscious of issues concerning fire it is a broad thing we do" (T12)

Health centres that are children-friendly and protect privacy

In exploring if facilities that were available to address incest cases were children-friendly and promoted confidentiality, answers given revealed that they were of the opinion that the health centres had the facilities with these features whiles the others such as GES and the Police service did not have them. Their narratives are as follows:

"We have the adolescent corner,, they really patronize it, they really do, But what I don't like is they educate them on the use of contraceptives, GES frown upon this, GES preaches on abstinence, but the health, they will tell you, you can use this, use that, do you get it? To prevent pregnancy. So most mothers take their children there for the contraceptive use." (T11)

"I don't really know what pertains at the adolescent corner, maybe the health they have it, I don't know how it works, but for education, we just go and if anything of that nature

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happens, we just walk about with the person, because of infrastructure issues, for DOVVSU, I cannot speak for them, for health, I know they have the adolescent corner. But DOVVSU, they come in only when we invite them. The privacy, when we go we realize they are also under a small corridor, I am sure they are as challenged as we are., There are a few shelters, when the need arises, they pull these girls from the perpetrators and prosecute the perpetrators, but the shelters are not enough, but for Dodowa here, I haven't seen any shelter, that if they should pursue, they will be able to pull the victim away from the perpetrator. If it is in the pipeline, I haven't heard." (T12)

Parental educational programs

In addition, school professionals also sensitized parents about sexual abuse cases that existed in the community. However, they were not main issues for discussion but rather discussed as and when they came up during parent teacher meetings. Their narratives are captured below:

"We organize sensitization seminar during PTA, durbars, this time we have targeted the markets. Maybe on a market day we will go to the market and sensitize the people especially the mothers to let children go to school at the right time instead of allowing them to hawk around in the marketplace" (T11)

"At the school level, this information is given over there. The head teachers hear these issues and the school reps are there, girls' education, guidance and counselling and SHEP, they do all these things at PTA level. So when they meet, though the span is always on their performance, any other matter, some do chip in these things. At the church level too, a few programs have been organized, not by the school, but a few church programs, the teachings they have, allow people to be educated, but still…" (T12)

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B) How equipped teachers' feel

Analysing the accounts of how equipped these teachers who were chosen to manage the challenges that these adolescents faced most especially the case of incest, it emerged that majority of them felt that they were *not well equipped* in terms of skills and infrastructure to handle the cases of the victims. Some however felt that they had *teachers possess good skills* to deal with the situation. The themes are discussed as follows:

Not well equipped

Those who felt they were not well-equipped expressed worry and exasperation because of the state affairs. There were two categories of views, those who felt they were not equipped in terms of skills and those who felt that the lack of amenities rendered them less equipped.

For those who spoke of not having enough skills, they stated that they were not experts in dealing with such situations. They felt that they had little experience or knowledge and as such could not handle those situations in the best way that they should be handled. The extracts below give an account of this:

> *'... I am not a professional, I didn't do it as my career or whatever, but since you are a teacher, they will appoint you, one of you, each of us, they have given us something and this is my area. The little knowledge that I have, I have been using it and I have been attending workshop on it, even recently, they gave us some check list (T1)*
>
> *"I think I will say I am still not up to. Because they are other people who have much more experience than me. So we still need more skills we still have a lot to learn." (T3)*
>
> *"I will say that we do have some workshops on how to go about issues pertaining to children, but that may not be enough" (T7)*

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Others still felt they were not well equipped in terms of amenities and equipment that could be useful in helping these adolescents

> *"In terms of skills I have to do more research on the internet, in terms of amenities, unless the NGO's intervene, because we can't help much, they are some of the children who really need help. And our strength can't, unless the NGO's come" (T10)*
>
> *"If you say amenities for example, I am not sure we have a dressing room for the girls in terms of changing their pads and stuff, they don't. they have wash rooms that they can go and do the changing of course but it is not comfortable, so for the amenities no we don't" (T2)*
>
> *"I am not really equipped with all the things to handle cases like that" (T3)*

Teachers possess Good skills

Some teachers who on the other hand felt well equipped expressed this in their views. Constant research was named as a medium used in boosting their skills. This was captured by the extract below:

> *I research a lot and I read a lot so at all times I am on my phone searching for information. I even organized a talk for the children, especially the form 3, I didn't want to do that by myself so I invited the district coordinator, so I research to get to know how best I can handle the role given me. Apart from that, are also organized by the coordinator (T6)*

Also, there was the assertion that the skills that they needed to handle issues at their level was good enough, and that anything beyond them would be referred to those who could handle them.

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"Yes yes, at our level we handle it, when we feel it is above us, we know where to push the issue to, but at our level we can manage the issues" (T8)

C) **Barriers to help-seeking**

When asked if there were some barriers that hindered disclosure of abuse cases, themes that emerged suggested that a number of factors influenced how effectively these professionals could help the victims seek help. They stated that *fear* and *societal stigma, unfavourable tradition, underpowered non abusive parents, unconducive facilities, no involvement in clinical care, limited help offered by GES* were the main barriers.

Fear and stigma

Some school professionals stated that fear and stigma from the society were mainly the reasons that hindered victims of incest from reporting their abuse. One school professional simply stated in her response: *"yes they are afraid to report." (T11).* Another also reported as follows:

"yes, like I rightly said about the girl, people will say that she has led her father to cells or bars, even though she's been hurt, though she didn't like that. But she looked at the influences around, that her name will be mentioned that this person did this, or it is through this person that… so she was looking at the community and what people will say and the family. These were some of the things that could impede…" (T12)

Unfavourable tradition

Another school professional was of the view that certain traditions and norms in the society may have resulted in this act and if that was the case, there was little that could be done to curb the situation. The narrative below accounts for this:

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"but I think what eeh, we really need to consult. If we want really counsel the people of that vicinity, we need the contents of the chiefs, of the elders of that town, they need to, we need to or they need to lease with us. whatever be the case that will come forward, all that we will see in the school, we should be able to report or find out from them, this and that and that, this is an issue, is it purposely traditional or it is something that you the teacher might think you are helping, but at the end of the day trying to pull the child away from their tradition. That one too it's becoming something else, so it is like you don't get the support" (T3)

Underpowered non-abusive parents

When asked whether parents were empowered to report incest cases, the response revealed that even though parents were educated on the systems that handled such issues, they rather hindered disclosure due to fear of their children being stigmatized or in a bid not to wash the family's dirty lining in public. Below is the narrative:

"They rather shield the issue. mmmm in other not to publicize or, they see it as when they report their children will be stigmatized. So, they will settle it amicably at home but some are empowered they come out and report" (T11)

Unconducive facilities

Further asking what was preventing the community from having such structure, one official stated that issues such as privacy and confidentiality when dealing with cases at the guidance and counselling unit were not considered when putting up structures. Her narrative is as follows:

"looking at our office, it has already been designed and whoever designed, I don't know if the person took into cognition that there is a girls' unit, guidance and counselling and issues that privacy is needed. All the, here there is no privacy here, we are three in the

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room. Though we have the structure, the numbers, we have to be paired so the confidentiality issues deal with no pairing. If I am here with you, no body enters the room. Look at what we are doing, people come. But in a confidentiality room, you get maybe do not disturb, anybody seeing that sign or that statement, knows that something is…" (T12)

No involvement in clinical care

The officials also stated that they did not have any form of clinical care for the victims but rather they referred the victims to the health facilities where they received such services. They also stated that they did not have the mandate to send them to these facilities, however, they were allowed to make recommendations to these victims after which they were left on their own to deal with the issue. Their accounts of this is as below:

"They have a psychiatric in the health facility. During such instances I just linked them to her in their school during break time and then we talk. With the hospital they give the test, but we advise that the parents do it themselves the education doesn't go there. We the officers are not permitted to take the girls to the hospital, we are much interested in their school; coming back to school after delivery. We will Urge you to come back to school. This is your only chance in childhood." (T11)

"For the health sectors, they do it. But that's for the health sector. But for us we would... because we don't have any clinical objects to. So we do that. We quickly let them know that they have to go to the hospital. Like what I shared with you that, the girl we had to let her go quickly to the hospital to ascertain and confirm if she's really pregnant and the next step she has to take" (T12)

Limited help offered by Ghana Education Service

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In the area of the interventions offered by the Ghana Education Service, it was revealed that they were limited in the extent of the action they could take to help the girls. Here again, GES officials stated that they had no mandate to involve themselves in the cases of victims, but rather to inform the victims about the availability of services that could help them.

> *"we begin and make sure DOVVSU comes in and We are done. We are much interested in the referral. \we expect the child to do it personally because she can withdraw by saying that, mmmmm I have decided not to continue the issue and so we give out the referral to them to handle it themselves. What we do is behind the scene, they are not coming, they are afraid or they feel shy to do so" (T12)*
>
> *"Legally, we work with the DOVVSU. The girl for instance, we told her that either she goes to report to DOVVSU or to the Social Welfare but she didn't take any of those answers(options)" (T11)*

D) How resources can be boosted

As a way of assessing which kind of resource improvements these teachers thought were very necessary to them, how resources could be improved was explored. Under this, many areas were mentioned as needing intervention and improvement. The views that were expressed here included *workshops and training, better infrastructure and learning materials, getting experts to handle such roles, parental education, curricular improvement, and research and NGO intervention*. These themes are further discussed as follows:

Workshops and training

Analysing the content of this extract showed that participants were of the view that more workshops should be organized with the aim of building up the skills of these teachers. They stated

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that even though these workshops were organized, there were no designated funds for that and that hindered the quality and quantities of materials that could be used in training them. The number of meeting times were also woefully inadequate according to these teachers. These views are captured by the narratives below:

> *"I think it is once a term, but you know the point is, the materials she uses for the running of the workshop are funded by herself. there are times she makes appeals to the highest office, the response she will get will be the no money, so and so, so she will have to fall on her own resources to get the material, so it makes it difficult for us to have it continuously so we have it once a term. But it takes a whole day, by the close of the day a lot would have been done" (T6)*
>
> *"yes, we should update their knowledge, because for some of them they have no idea about this, so if we have this supplementary books around, when they go home and the father or step dad is doing something, once they have that in mind, they can be able to help themselves, but if you don't have all these things it is like. I will suggest that regular workshops and programs for the guidance and counselling teachers, not only at the same place but at least we should go to a higher level where teachers involved can go outside their jurisdiction to learn more" (T5)*
>
> *"we really need we really need, when we talk about skills apart from theory, theory, theory. What we learn in the book yes, but the practical aspect is dicey, more than the theory. My sister, you will learn the theory you will come sometimes you realize that it doesn't blend on the field because the kids that is coming…" (T3)*
>
> *"So we may need more of workshops and other engagement so that we can frequently update ourselves with issues happening, more infrastructure" (T7)*

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More infrastructure and learning materials

Views that were raised under this theme showed that some teachers also felt that there was the need to have proper personnel, infrastructure and learning materials to enable them to properly assist the students anytime they needed help.

"I will suggest that, can we have, if we can have some mentors, or book or graphics or anything of that sort, where we have issues relating to incest, rape drug abuse, or all these social vices so that we can teach them and once a while pick these books to read and see the effects" (T7)

"Yes, there's more to be done because situations are not permanent, its changes and so we would want to educate our children more on elements that can lead to incest and they should be able to detect it. When they are at home, they were their uncles touch them, feel he is my uncle, no, when he touches you in a particular way. You are a lady, when a man touches you in the way you will know that no, this kind of touching is dangerous" (T8)

Appropriate personnel for guidance and counselling

Other teachers were also of the view that students will really benefit if there were personnel whose sole responsibility was to act as a Guidance and Counselling Coordinator for these students since sometimes the student teacher relationship could get in the way of having a good counselling relationship with them. The following extract account for this:

"There should be a personal solely for guidance and counselling not somebody who is teaching the children and at the same time counselling. In that sense it becomes somehow unapproachable and difficult. I am saying this because every day you are with the kids., you talk to them, teaching and other things. Because of that cordiality

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some of them, tend not to see the importance. But should you be, let's say reserve somewhere and they know that this is an issue I need to... good." (T3)

School curricular improvement

Other accounts suggested that there was no designated time allocated for meeting students to discuss various issues that they were facing. This according to the teachers was very worrying because it meant that they could not make adequate time to meet the students and even when they did, the students also were also engaged by other teachers. The extracts below account for this assertion:

"I think if, our meeting times should be on the time table as well, because sometimes it creates problems for us. When we want to meet the kids, you go to other classes to call them, then the teachers there will be like I am teaching, I have a lesson I have to take it, so you can't take my period like that. But when it is fixed on the timetable, when it is time they know that it is time for this, so they will release the children for us to go and have whatever we want to have with them and pass on the information we want to give to them." (T4)

"We have certain days that we are supposed to meet but because of but because of our other duties assigned to us or other roles, I am not able to make time. And I am a class teacher as well. It makes my work very difficult for me because at least I should meet them twice in a term maybe, at the beginning of the term and when the term is coming to an end, I have to meet them but I am not able to do that because of time and other things" (T4)

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Parental education

There were other views that suggested that parents also needed to get involved in other to get the best of services provided to them. In other words, results of the efforts of the teacher will be noticed when parents played their role at home very well by providing the needs of the children, educating them and assuring them of their love. The narrative below accounts for this assertion:

"I hope as time goes on education will change, because parents don't also talk to their children, if you are a woman and you have children and they are girls they need to be talked to you all the time, and you need to let them know that you love them. If it turns out this way that the person who is telling them things outside love them more than you, they are many things they will not even come to tell you." (T5)

Personal research, NGO intervention

Another teacher also stated that the best way to improve skills was to do personal research and also appeal to the NGO's to help them acquire more infrastructure.

"In terms of skills I have to do more research on the internet, in terms of amenities, unless the NGO's intervene, because we can't help much, they are some of the children who really need help. And our strength can't, unless the NGO's come." (T10)

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CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION

The discussion section discusses results obtained from the analyses of the data from the study. This involves discussion of the experiences of the victims of incest, the effects of the abuse as well as views from stakeholders in the community. This section also contains the implications of the study, the recommendations, limitations as well as the conclusion of the study.

5.1 Discussion of descriptive findings

The descriptive findings of this study sought to quantitatively describe the suicidal tendencies of the incest victims and also screen them for the presence of psychological distress. Results from the analysis of data from the eight girls showed they all suffered various levels of psychological distress. This is in line with literature that suggests that incest victims suffer from a psychological distress as a result of the trauma that they experience. (Filipas & Ulman, 2006; Brodsky & Stanley, 2008; Mangilio, 2009). According to Mangilio incest victims were at risk of developing a wide range of psychological disorders including depression, anxiety and stress among others. In the area of suicide, it was found in the study that the four girls who reported not having suicidal behaviour of any sort were girls who experienced the incestuous abuse just once. Out of the other four girls who reported having suicidal ideation, three were girls who were experiencing recurrent abuses and one had not disclosed the abuse to a third party. Suggesting that the recurrent abuses as well as non-disclosure, heightened a victims' chances of engaging in suicidal behaviour. These findings are co with findings in literature which suggest that girls who experienced recurrent incestuous abuse are more prone to suicidal behaviours as compared to those who experienced it just once and also, disclosure was a tool that buffered against suicidal tendencies (Cankaya, Talbot, Ward & Duberstein, 2012; Obineli, 2013).

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5.2 Discussion of Qualitative findings

This study aimed at exploring the subjective experiences of girls who were victims of incest and the various resources that were available to help them cope. Stakeholders' perspectives were also sought on the extent of help available for these girls and how effective these were, as well as the barriers that they encountered in trying to provide help to these victims.

5.2.1 Incest Victims

In exploring the experiences of these incest victims, the themes were divided into subjective experiences of incest and life after the incest experience. Under the incest experiences of the girls, the major themes were classified into subjective experiences of incest, relationship with perpetrator after act, disclosure status, action taken following disclosure, social support following disclosure, emotions following disclosure, reason assigned to act and the effect of the act. Most of the girls reported having first experienced this in their early teens. In exploring who the perpetrators were, a majority of them were guardians to the girls with one being the biological father of the victim. It was however noted that the girls who were abused by their guardian, had either lost their biological father or were living with their mother and that guardian because their mother had divorced or separated from their father. These factors confirm the assertion that broken homes as well as homes where the father is not the biological father of the child count as risk factors for incest (Essabar, Khalqallah, & Dakhamait, 2015; Stroebel et al., 2013).

Circumstances surrounding the first experiences of the abuse indicated powerlessness and helplessness with a feeling of devastation. This finding was consistent with Lorentzen, Nilsen, and Traeen's, (2008) findings that most victims of incest become helpless and powerless at the hands of their perpetrators who played on this had their way with them, and left them with devastating experiences. Powerlessness and helplessness of the victim, according to Lorentzen, Nilsen, and

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Traeen, (2008), has been a significant and central theme in most accounts of incest. According to these same authors, this phenomenon however has been found to leave the victim trapped even years after the abuse has been terminated because the abusive experiences becomes an internalized part of their construction of self, due to the breach of trust by adults who are supposed to be protective of them. Thus, making life afterwards challenging for them to live.

The relationship between the victim and the perpetrator has been considered very important in assessing the effects of sexual assault for the victim, (Ullman, Filipas, Townsend and Starzynski, 2006). This relationship has been linked with psychosocial outcomes for the victims of sexual abuse. Such that the more trusting the relationship is, the more drastic the psychosocial effects on the victim (Filipas & Ullman, 2006). In exploring their relationship with the perpetrators before the act, narratives from the girls showed they had a cordial father-daughter relationship with the perpetrator. This indicated that that they had a relationship of trust with the perpetrator. In other words, they had a feeling of security, protection, love and care when they were with the perpetrator prior to the incident (Anderson, 2006; Freyd, 1996). However, after the abusive experience, the victims reported negative emotions towards the perpetrators of the act. They reported emotions such as disrespect, fear and hatred. These incest victims' narratives suggested that they all had negative feelings towards the perpetrators as compared to the positive feelings that they had towards them prior to the incident. This suggests that mistrust develops as a result of the act which in turn can impact negatively on victims and even lead them to become paranoid. These range of negative emotion suggest that the victims were at risk of developing negative psychosocial outcomes as reported by Ullman, Filipas, Townsend and Starzynski (2006).

In exploring what they thought were the reasons why they became victims to this act, the victims were of the view that they were either being punished, paying for a crime committed by

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another or blaming themselves. Others also felt that it happened as a result of the perpetrators bad behaviours such as smoking or negative thoughts. These findings show that the victims mostly attributed the cause of the abuse to themselves which in turn affected their psychological wellbeing. This is because most of them were unforgiving towards themselves or were excessively worried about how to correct those character traits in themselves. These findings showed consistency with findings from Ullman, Filipas, Townsend and Starzynski (2006) which stated that self-blame was characteristic of sexual abuse victims who were closer to their offenders. Further stating that this put them at a greater risk of psychological disorders.

In the area of disclosure, it was observed that all the victims but one, had disclosed the abuse to a third party. However, it was observed that those who experienced a one-time abuse reported the incident from between a few minutes to a few days after the disclosure. Whiles those who experienced multiple occasions of abuse took a much longer time to disclose, a phenomenon that was also consistent with Herschkowitz, Lanes and Lamb's, (2007) report as well as Priebe and Svedin's, (2008). These researchers indicated that the victims who were abused by known people were less likely to disclose the event to parents or caregivers but rather disclose to friends or siblings as compared to those who had been abused by strangers. It also observed that upon disclosure, most of those disclosed to took little or no action. In the case where help was attempted to be given, it was stopped midway, rendering the victim helpless and at the mercy of the perpetrator. This supports the assertion that the false beliefs that the system of patriarchy upholds, such as males are unable to control their sexual desires, and the perceived protection of the larger family from shame and also the perceived protection of the victim from shame, negatively affects the tendencies to disclose incest and also undermines disclosed cases of incest (Boakye, 2009, Collin-Vézina, Sablonnière-Griffin, Palmer & Milne, 2015).

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After disclosure, especially for those who disclosed to guardians or people they thought were in the position to help them like their teachers, most of these girls had the expectations of being rescued from the situation and having the perpetrator being punished. This however did not turn out to be the case for all of them. The girls were not believed when they disclosed or received solutions in the form of advice or measures that were woefully inadequate to stop the act from being carried out further. This is consistent with findings from Herman, (2005), that the incestuous abuse often leads to the estrangement of the victim from her family as a result of family members feeling guilty about the incident, not believing the child or siding with the perpetrator, who is a usually a breadwinner or a cherished family member. Also, the issue of disclosure resonates with Crisma et al, (2004) and Boateng's (2015) findings that in trying to seek help, victims disclosed to one or more people but in most cases, they received little attention, were not believed, and offered little or no help. Crisma et al, (2004) further states that obviously, the problem was not the reluctance of abused to disclose, since there was some form of disclosure. This however, further reveals society's nature to most often ignore the long term effect of the abuse on the individual and choose to rather shield the victim from shame and stigma and also protect the interest of the larger family. This value in collective family system is upheld much more than individual goals. As such these girls' ordeal are likely to be overlooked or not dealt with the urgency that they need to be dealt with (Boakye, 2009).

Also, some of these victims reported being asked by the non-abusing guardian to endure their ordeal because of the support that the perpetrator was offering them. The non-perpetrating guardian in these cases were not economically able to cater for the basic needs of these victims. To them, the future of these girls was more important as compared to the adversities they were facing. They however expected these girls to endure these abuses at least, till they got a basic

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education which they could not readily offer. This highlights the assertion that among other factors, low socio-economic status was a risk factor for the occurrence of incest (Crowley, 2007; Essabar, Khalqallah, & Dakhamait, 2015; Stroebel et al., 2013). In this case, low economic status on the part of the non-perpetrating guardian rendered her unable to adequately cater for the victim in the absence of the perpetrator who was the sole breadwinner. These findings however resonate with existing literature suggesting that most of the decision to disclose is made by victims of incest (Herman, 2005).

However, reactions such as multiple interviews or hearings, the disruption the incident causes in their lives, the reactions of others towards them, the denials from the perpetrator, the outrages, the confrontations, and the ostracism that the victims face, are in most cases more disturbing to the victims than the abuse itself that was experienced (Herman, 2005; Collin-Vézina, Sablonnière-Griffin, Palmer & Milne, 2015). In this case, even though they want to talk about the abuse and stop it, they either do not disclose at all or do so to other third parties other than to trusting adults (Herman, 2005). For the one girl who did not disclose, it was observed that non-disclosure was attributed to the ill-treatment she received from her stepmother and the recurrent disbelief that she experienced. This, confirms Collin-Vézina, Sablonnière-Griffin, Palmer and Milne's, (2015) findings that victims who came from dysfunctional homes usually perceived that they would receive negative reactions upon disclosure and thus, refrained from disclosure.

Results obtained, in relation to the effects of incest in the lives of the girls, revealed that most of the victims suffered negative consequences from the act. They reported that the act had negatively impacted their physical health, social lives and mental health. They reported loss of trust, educational challenges, change of old habits, unhappiness, anger, and unwanted pregnancy and the negative effects of abortions. This is consistent with reports, (Anderson, 2006; Patel,

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Flisher, Nikapota, & Malhotra, 2008; Sossou &. Yogtiba, 2008), which state that sexual abuse has negative consequences such as loss of trust in close relations as a result of feelings of betrayal, sense of powerlessness, the inability to develop secure relationships in the future, on the children who unfortunately become victims of the act, loss of trust in close relations as a result of feelings of betrayal, sense of powerlessness, and the inability to develop secure relationships in the future. These however are very common in middle- and low-income countries and as such, it was prudent that culturally appropriate forms of professional intervention were offered to such victims (Patel, Flisher, Nikapota, & Malhotra, 2008; Sossou &. Yogtiba, 2008).

Also, these girls reported that they had some interpersonal problems. They reported having feelings of hostility towards males, discomfort when interacting with others and being less trusting of others especially those they felt had a hand in their ordeal such as exposing them to such an act and self-blaming. This is consistent with assertion that incest is an act that betrays the trust that victims usually place in people, with the victims' tendency of blaming themselves for the incident (Filipas & Ullman, 2006). In addition to these effects, suicidal behaviours and self-harming behaviours have been reported as one of the most devastating effects of incest among those from low economic status backgrounds (Yates, Carlson & Egeland, 2008). Other studies have suggested that victims of incest have a much-heightened tendency of suicidal behaviour (Obineli, 2013). The present study also identified a reason that was assigned for attempting to commit suicide. This reason was that the girls saw suicide as a cry for help. When disclosure yields no results and the victim feels very distressed and helpless, suicide was perhaps a way of getting their plight across to society. Suicide therefore was a way of telling society that they were suffering and they were not in support of what was happening to them, supporting findings from (Obineli 2013). In addition to that, suicide was the only way of ensuring they had their peace of mind. Findings revealed that

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these victims were of the mindset that that if they were not getting the needed help here, then death was the only way where they were assured of getting their peace of mind.

Suicide was however discontinued because of religious reasons, specifically teachings that admonished followers not to take their own lives. This suggests that religion had a role to play in preventing suicide (Gall, 2006). According to Gall, Teachings and doctrines from religious bodies could emphasize on the need to avoid taking one's own life to prevent people from committing suicide. Even though incest has been reported to lead to very devastating effects on these adolescents, some of the victims have been able to live almost normal lives nonetheless, and adapt to their situation with the help of intrinsic resources such as coping mechanisms in the absence of external help (Gall, 2006).

Coping mechanisms were also explored to better understand how these girls dealt with their situation. It was observed that some girls used the religious coping method where prayer was employed as the main tool for coping among those who had experience recurrent abuse, were suicidal and were highly distressed. In this instance, Gall, (2006) reports that those who experience very severe sexual abuse at a very young age, usually surrender their distressing situation over to God and seek his support rather than others due to their early loss of trust in others and have yielded positive results. Also, emotional coping was employed, where the girls reported employing tools such as distraction, disclosure, positive reframing and aggression to relieve themselves of the negative emotions that came with memories of their experiences. Destructive methods such as aggression have yielded negative outcome for victims by increasing distress unlike the more positive methods such as positive reframing, disclosure and distraction have led to more positive outcomes (Cantón-Cortés & Cantón, 2010; Wright, Crawford & Sebastian, 2007). In addition, Problem focused coping was also adopted by these victims. Even though problem focused coping

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has been identified as yielding positive outcomes, the method employed by these girls in the present study may not be permanent solutions to their predicament. Girls reported specifically employing some level of physical aggression or solution to try to deter the perpetrator even though these solutions were woefully inadequate to resolve their issues as they further reported did not solve the situation. This may buttress the point of the girls being helpless and feeling hopeless. Also, this shows how the victims are not receiving appropriate help because if they did, their distress levels will have reduced. This phenomenon supports findings in literature that suggests that increased experience of trauma may require that victims employ methods to try to deal with the problem even when these methods were not effective enough to deal with the problem (Walsh, Fortier & DiLillo, 2010).

5.2.2 Key Informants

The aim of interviewing the key informants was to find out the kind of amenities and services that were available to victims of incest in the community in a bid to end the abuse and how accessible these amenities and services were. The findings of the study revealed that most key informants knew some victims of incest in their school or in other schools in the community whiles a few others did not. It was interesting to note that most of these narratives differed from each other suggesting that there were multiple cases of incest and most of these were made known through third party reports. This showed that even though there was disclosure, these victims did not readily go to the teachers as a first point of call. Friends of the victim, community members and family of the victim were stated as people they got the information from, confirming assertions that victims of incest did not readily disclose the incident to trusted adults or caregivers (Hershkowitz, Lanes & Lamb, 2007; Priebe & Svedin, 2008).

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Further, exploring how they felt about perpetrators of incest, themes that emerged suggested that even though the teachers condemned such acts and the people who committed them, they were willing to give such perpetrators of the act some benefit of the doubt considering certain factors. Tradition was one of these factors, according to results from this study, if tradition supported this act, there was little one could do to change the situation. This assertion is a strong indicator that in collectivist societies, the collective family values and goals override the individual needs and determine the course of a situation (Boakye, 2009, Boateng, 2015). These findings suggest that key informants may also be learned helpless because they feel they do not have the adequate means to curb the abuse situation against these minors, hence their position.

In addition, other teachers' narratives also demonstrated that careful investigations were required in dealing with incest cases. In this instance, dialogue was needed to reveal the cause of the act and if it revealed that there was a justification for incest, it was likely that the case would not be taken any further. Reasons given for this approach was to offer protection for victims who were at risk of further abuse because the community could not provide them shelters if the situation was not handled with tact. This phenomenon further throws light on the fact that even though the incest act was wrong, the society did not have adequate structures to shield victims of such acts. This further confirms findings in previous studies that poor socio economic state and psychosocial state of the community is a major risk factor for the occurrences of various kinds of abuses because there are little or no structures deal with the perpetrators of the abuses (Crowley, 2007; Essabar, Khalqallah, & Dakhamait, 2015; Read, Hammersley & Rudegeair, 2007; Stroebel et al., 2013). However, it could also be the case that there are certain values in patriarchal societies that gave room for such acts to occur, such as males are not to be blamed for incestuous acts since they have little control over their sexual desires (Boakye, 2009; UNICEF, 2014). In most instances of incest,

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the perpetrators often are breadwinners who wield so much power such that, they are not challenged when they abuse the power (Boakye, 2009; Manyonganise & Museka, 2010). These factors create loopholes for perpetrators of such acts and encourages others to shield them.

Concerning the most appropriate action to be taken to help incest victims, being non-judgmental towards the victims was mentioned. Here, it was important to win the trust of the victims and not to do anything that will push the victims away. Here, these teachers were seen to have some form of sympathy for the victims and were willing to offer them basic social and counselling support help in terms of lending them a listening ear and not pointing accusing fingers at them. However, other teachers also stated that if it was recurrent as opposed to a one-time incident, after exploring the case, it would be reported to the appropriate quarters, which was their superiors in the educational system as the protocol channel demanded. Findings here suggests that some of the teachers were only going to treat the abuse situation as a serious offence only if it was committed more than once, as opposed to a one time abuse case, which was going to be treated as a trivial matter.

It was also found that some key informants perceived the perpetrator as an abnormal person. Views here suggested that the perpetrators of incest were people who were suffering from a psychological disorder, lacked self-discipline, or were practicing the act to pacify an oracle. Thus, supporting claims of an ‘excuse culture’, where perpetrators of the incest abuse were not directly responsible for the act but rather some other force they had little or no control over was to be blamed, such as the devil, or the male gender having little or no control over their sexual desires (Boakye, 2009).

Even though these teachers did not out rightly condemn the perpetrators, they had views on the kinds of sanctions that were appropriate for such people. Legal sanctions were the most

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prescribed. Imprisonment was a very popular form of punishment that since it was seen as the best way that could serve as a good deterrent to others. Others however were open to any form of punishment that was prescribed by the legal authorities (Osam, 2004). It was however noted that some of these teachers were of the view that the family system should be considered when meting out sanctions, so that when the perpetrator had other children or was a breadwinner, the punishment should be lessened.

It was also noted that the suggested punishment was consistent with previous findings by Herman (2005) who sought to find out society's preferred punishment for sex offenders. He found that most of them sought justice, not as a means to heal the victim but as a means to just satisfy social conventions even though they wished that the abuse would be terminated. As such, it was easy for them to appeal for lesser punishments considering the victims' role they played in the society. This was another factor indicating how the family's collective values and interest was placed above the individuals.

In addition, low socio-economic status, especially on the part of the non-perpetrating guardian, made it difficult for them to single handedly cater for the victim and other family members in the absence of the perpetrator, confirming findings from literature (Crowley, 2007; & Quarshie et al, 2017). Findings of the present study also revealed there was view that if the case was properly investigated, and the victim was found guilty of leading the perpetrator on in any way, or there were situations at home such as the absence of the mother or divorce, then the punishment will not be needed. This was another stance that confirmed the patriarchal society's view that males were sexually weak and as such were not responsible for carrying out acts such as incest (Boakye, 2009). These factors listed made perpetrators get away with lesser or no punishment.

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The next proposed sanction was issuing a fine for the perpetrator to pay. This was supposed to be a form of compensation for the victim per traditional demands and also serve as a deterrent for others. Even though castration and psychological counselling came up as sanctions, there were the least popular forms suggested by the key informants.

In addition to this, how willing these teachers were to aid victims of incest get the appropriate sanction for perpetrators was explored. Findings from the results revealed that even though the teachers were willing to help the victim, there were several factors they considered as obstacles that prevented them from going all out. The themes that emerged from this are willingness of victims to cooperate; here in instances where victims were being threatened, they usually denied having had experience. Trying to push the case any further was putting the life of the victim at risk and putting the teacher in trouble. This could be attributed to the victims seeing the teachers as authority figures who they could not trust as a result of projecting feelings of mistrust of adults they are supposed to trust unto these teachers.

In addition, these teachers may not possess the right communication skills to be able to elicit disclosure from the victims. Another barrier was the non-efficient channels that they had to use in addressing the issue. As school coordinators, their mandate was very limited. The furthest they could go in trying to deal with the case was reporting to the headmaster, who in turn had to forward it to the district office. As teachers, they could not directly involve any other social structure that could be of help to the victim. As such, even if there were structures to deal with this menace, the long process was a put off in trying to pursue the case. To emphasize on these findings, Hinkelman and Bruno, (2008) have reported similarly that there has been the tendency for school personnel to delay reporting abuse cases because of disbelief, denial that such abuse can affect

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children in the school, fear of the reaction of the family and fear of straining the relationships between the child and family.

Even though there were special programs to address the issue of sexual abuse in the community and to also boost disclosure among students, such as gender clubs in the schools, parental awareness programs, it seemed that there was still a little more work to be done in that area. These findings suggest that for teachers to be able elicit disclosure from students, there needs to be programs that directly addressed the issues intently, fight against traditional barriers and also ensure that they respect child's needs and autonomy, protect the child's confidentiality, and an assurance of resolution of the abuse and to help begin the recovery process (Herman, 2005).

Narratives from the key informants revealed that at the societal level, certain traditions or norms exist that may be subtly promoting sexual abuses in general in the community. Such traditions listed were the *dipo* puberty rites which ushered adolescents into adulthood after the adolescent had experienced her menarche. Here, girls were seen as matured ready for marriage, and according to key informants, the society felt they were matured enough to engage in sexual relations. These findings confirm existing literature which states that certain norms and values, such as the males feeling sexually entitled to females and the stigma that is attached to disclosure justify certain forms of violence such as incest and make them seem normal (UNICEF, 2014). In addition to this, certain traditional proverbs were also held responsible for hindering the disclosure of such abuses. One that readily came up was that a child must not be heard but rather seen. In this case, an adults' account of an event was given more precedence as compared to that of a child. These norms according to UNICEF, (2014), may have an impact on disclosure tendencies of victims of incest and the non-abusing parent or caregiver, thus, encouraging perpetrators to continue their abuse.

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The narratives further revealed that at the community level, the Ghana Education Service (GES) had prescribed channel for addressing such abuses. This included some level of counselling and recommendations to report the abuse case to the law enforcers, since GES did not have the mandate to involve itself in the case. However, results from the study showed that in most cases, this was only possible if the family gave permission for the case to be reported and if the victim was not responsible for the act, that is, she played no role in enticing the perpetrator further emphasizing the role of the family in determining how the abuse case was handled. this finding was consistent with existing literature by Boakye, (2009); Manyonganise & Museka, (2010) & UNICEF, (2014), which asserts that most of the time, males from patriarchal societies were not held responsible for incestuous acts because they were seen as the gender that wielded so much power and also had little control over their sexual desires.

. The lack of effectiveness of the prescribed channel of the Ghana Education may however be an evidence of the gap between theory and practice. In practice, this channel may be too cumbersome, and not providing desirable results because GES limits the school professionals in terms of the help they can offer to victims of incest. According to the professionals, the furthest they could go was to recommend to the victims the appropriate channels to report to, leaving the victims to continue seeking justice all by themselves. This clearly yielding very little results in terms of seeking justice for the victim.

With these added roles, teachers were required to possess certain skills that they could use to help students in distress to relieve them of their distress. In exploring themes concerning how equipped they felt handling the roles, it emerged that some of them felt they were not well equipped in terms of amenities, whiles others felt they lacked some skills. In terms of amenities, there were not enough facilities to boost their interactions with girls such as meeting places and dressing

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rooms. Others who said they lacked skills stated that they were not trained professionals and that the workshops organized for them by the district was not enough to give them the needed training. Some teacher however expressed satisfaction in the skills that they possessed with the view that, those skills were enough to handle distress cases at their level.

These teachers were also of the view that certain things could be done to boost their skills and amenities available to help students. Among these were regular workshops and training sessions aimed at building the skills of teachers. The workshops that were being held according to these teachers were not enough to teach them all the skills they needed. In addition to that, there was little or no funds allocated to purchase enough and quality materials that could boost their skills. Another theme that emerged was the provision of more infrastructure and learning materials to educate children as well as proper personnel to handle such roles. There was also the call for proper personnel to handle the roles of guidance and counselling in the schools. This serves as a call for the GES to engage the services of qualified counsellors and clinical psychologists to handle those roles in the various educational institutions. In addition to this, teachers called for an improvement in the school curricular since it was a daunting task trying to juggle mainstream school work and their added roles. They further stated that there was no official meeting time for various clubs that were under their mandate, as such, they were in conflict with other teachers when they had to call for meetings since it will mean a disruption of class activities. This has also been reported by Hinkelman and Bruno, (2008), that many school personnel feeling ill equipped to tackle child abuse cases. This highlights the inadequacy of the measures put in place by GES to handle issues of such nature.

It was reported that parents, especially non-perpetrating parents had a role to play in non-disclosure of incest cases because they rather shielded the cases for fear of dragging the family

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name in the mud. Also, the low socio economic status of non-perpetrating parents especially, made it difficult for them to report such cases. Further investigations revealed that even though at the PTA levels, such issues came up sometimes, the teachers were of the view that their efforts could only yield results if parents played their role at home very well by providing the needs of the children, educating them and assuring them of their love and also engaging in some economic activities to increase their earnings. It was also revealed that there were no specific programs to address incest even though they knew of its existence, but rather programs that addressed sexual abuse as a whole. These programs were tailored more towards sensitizing the children and not really the parents even though once a while such issues came up for discussion. Also, they stated that there existed an NGO that provided some assistance to students on their program who are able to get to the JHS level which acted as a form of support for parents. However, the NGO covered just a few schools.

Infrastructure such as appropriate meeting spaces and appropriate rooms for counselling was also another thing that teachers and officials spoke about. Infrastructure was not available, and for those that were available, it was not convenient enough to handle very sensitive issues such as incest. District officials stated that their buildings were not created to facilitate confidentiality because plans from the scratch did not take into consideration of such issues. They further stated that other service providers such as the police service also lacked such amenities, even though they stated that situations may be better at the health centres.

Also, even though not a popular stance, there was a call for these teachers to conduct personal research on how to boost their skills for now since they were facing challenges in getting that from their employers. There was also the need to understand the tradition of the land. There was the view that if the traditions of the land were not properly understood, there was always going

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to be conflict when addressing certain sensitive issues. As such, there was the need to consult with the traditional authorities and understand the society's traditions. This was a necessary call because literature has shown that in order to achieve best results in dealing with abuse cases especially incest, there was the need to put in place measures that were culturally appropriate (Patel, Flisher, Nikapota, & Malhotra, 2008; Sossou &. Yogtiba, 2008). As such, it was necessary to revisit the traditions of the society in trying to curb the menace.

5.4 Limitations and recommendations for future studies

There are some limitations to the above study. The sample size for this particular study was small as it proved difficult identifying the victims and very challenging getting consent from the girls to participate in the study. In addition, only four schools were involved in this study because these were schools pointed out by some key informants as having victims they knew about. Future studies however should aim at exploring other schools in the district, in order to ascertain a broader picture of the pattern of abuse in the district. Also, due to the small sample size, findings of this study cannot be generalized to the larger population. Further research in this area can involve other stakeholders in the community such as individuals from the traditional system, the district assembly, the police service, health sector and the social welfare departments to be able to fully ascertain the quality of services available for such victims and the challenges that such stakeholders face in trying to help victims of incest.

5.3 Recommendations for policy and clinical practice

Findings from this study have suggested that the incest abuse impacts on the lives of its victims in a very negative way and as such, appropriate measures need to be put in place to prevent further abuses of girls, to encourage the disclosure and to ensure that systems and structures are in place. In addition, older adults who matter, such as school professionals should be equipped and

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empowered to be able to fight this menace. These findings further suggest that a lot needs to be done in order to end abuse among children in line with the World Health Organization vision by 2030.

First of all, in trying to implement and enforce the laws on sexual abuse especially incest, there should be an emphasis on protecting the child. These laws should also hold perpetrators highly accountable for their act. This will demonstrate to the society that the incest abuse is wrong and is not acceptable or pardonable by law (WHO, 2018). In addition to this, the WHO, (2018) calls for the formulation of sound policies to empower females at all levels of the society, in order to give them a voice against all forms of vices against them.

Secondly, in addressing the norms and values of the society, steps should be taken to create an 'alternative positive discourse of culture'. The deeply rooted culture that promotes the victimization of females and the normalization of the incest abuse should be questioned WHO, (2018). Here, the cultural beliefs which lead to the sexual manipulation of the girl child need to be questioned. These beliefs should be interrogated at the national, community and family levels in order to let all individuals at all these levels that incest is a wrong act, which no societal value or norm can justify. In addition, preventive interventions that are context specific and sensitive and principles of the society can be investigated and implemented to further address the issue (Manyonganise & Museka, 2010; Venganai, 2015).

According to the WHO, (2018), schools are a place positive behaviour can be taught and acquired. These behaviours are very necessary to preventing violence as a whole in the community. In this case, the policy makers especially those of GES have a huge role to play in acting as advocates for these girls in this fight against incest. This advocacy role should include policies or guidelines the mandatory involvement of all necessary bodies that need to be involved to fight the

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abuse such as the health sector, the legal sector and the traditional system to address issues bothering incest. This also a call for intensive sensitization and educational programs to be conducted to educate the public on the devastating effect of incest on the lives of victims, the structure of the family and the community as a whole.

Thirdly, to be able to adequately serve as advocates, the school professionals need to be given appropriate training to develop their set skills that will enable them to effectively play their role. There should be the provision of adequate infrastructure for school counsellors. However, it is recommended that the role of qualified personnel should not be overlooked. Here, the services qualified clinical psychologists and counsellors will be highly needed. These professionals will come with the ability to diagnose and intervene in these abuse cases in order to promote the psychological wellbeing of victims.

Fourthly, there is the need to intensify child education on sexual abuse with the encouragement of clubs such as girl clubs that have already been established by GES to promote discussion of abuse, child rights and to act as social support for each other (Herman, 2005). These clubs however should be more defined, regularized and incorporated into the curriculum of the various schools.

Also, there is the need for parent and caregiver support in order to help the parents and guardians understand why it is needful to nurture their dependents in positive environments. In addition to this, parents need to be taught the right parenting skills (WHO, 2018). To add to that, according to Manyonganise & Museka, (2010), there is also the need for parents and guardians especially the females, to be monitor the relationship between their children and other male relatives by ensuring that there is the maintenance of a ‘critical distance’ between them. Further buttressing this stance, Manyonganise & Museka, stated that we were in an era where there was

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no such thing such as a trusted protector of one's own children thereby making it important for female guardians to be more conscious of this.

Finally, there need to be the creation of safe environments for victims of such abuses to act as alternate care facilities for these victims. These structures should be established in the community to serve as shelters and counselling centres in the district for victims of incest. These structures should have helplines with standby resource personnel at all times to offer help to victims anytime they call on them. These structures need to be active and vibrant in the community in offering services to help victims and bring perpetrators to book (WHO, 2018).

5.5 Conclusion

This study revealed that there were various challenges that incest victims faced such as psychological distress as a result of experiencing abuse as well as psychosocial distress upon disclosure of the act. Meaning that the effect of the incestuous act was very devastating to the victims, with little or no protective factors to shield them in the community. Key informants also listed several barriers that prevented them from seeking justice for these victims, prominent among them being the traditional values and societal norms. The patriarchal nature of the community gave room for these incestuous abuses to be trivialized, thus making victims of the act powerless and helpless. It is therefore necessary that among other measures, the traditional values and norms be revisited and challenged in order to reorient the members of the community about the dangers that the act poses. Structural changes in the system of GES is needed in order to bridge the gap between its theory and practice in trying to help victims of incest abuse. There should also be massive educational campaigns both for girls and the members of the community about the effects of incest.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Questionnaires

Part 1: Demographic Questionnaire:

Kindly supply your personal information and family background

I. **Age:** …….

II. **Educational level**:

(1) Primary (2) Junior High

III. Religious affiliation:

(1) Christianity (2) Islam (3) Traditional religion (4) Others

IV. Parents' educational levels:

(a) Father:

(1) Uneducated (2) Primary (3) Junior high (4) Senior high (5) Tertiary

(b) Mother:

(1) Uneducated (2) Primary (3) Junior high (4) Senior high (5) Tertiary

V. Parents' employment status:

(a) Father:

(1) Unemployed (2) Self-employed (3) Other specify ……

(b) Mother:

(1) Unemployed (2) Self-employed (3) Other, specify ……..

VI. Number of siblings: ……

VII. Birth order: ……

VIII. Who do you stay with?

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Part 2: The Suicidal Behavior Questionnaire Revised (Osman, Gutierrez, Konick, Kopper & Barrios, 2001)

For each of the following, tick the number beside the statement that best describes you.

1. **Have you ever thought about or attempted to kill yourself?**

	1. Never
	2. It was just a brief passing thought
	3a. I have had a plan at least once to kill myself but did not try to do it
	3b. I have had a plan at least once to kill myself and really wanted to die
	4a. I have attempted to kill myself, but did not want to die
	4b. I have attempted to kill myself, and really hoped to die

2. **How often have you thought about killing yourself in the past year?**

	1. Never
	2. Rarely (1 time)
	3. Sometimes (2 times)
	4. Often (3-4 times)
	5. Very often (5 or more times)

3. **Have you ever told someone that you were going to commit suicide, or that you might do it?**

	1. No
	2a. Yes, at one time, but did not really want to die
	2b. Yes, at one time and really wanted to die
	3a. Yes, more than once, but did not want to do it
	3b. Yes, more than once and really wanted to do it

4. **How likely is it that you will commit suicide someday?**

	0. Never
	1. No chance at all
	2. Rather unlikely
	3. Unlikely
	4. Likely
	5. Rather likely
	6. Very likely

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Part C: Depression, Anxiety and Stress Scale-21 items (DASS-21, Lovibond & Lovibond, 1995)

DASS21 *Name:* *Date:*

Please read each statement and circle a number 0, 1, 2 or 3 which indicates how much the statement applied to you *over the past week*. There are no right or wrong answers. Do not spend too much time on any statement.

The rating scale is as follows:

0 Did not apply to me at all
1 Applied to me to some degree, or some of the time
2 Applied to me to a considerable degree, or a good part of time
3 Applied to me very much, or most of the time

1	I found it hard to wind down	0	1	2	3
2	I was aware of dryness of my mouth	0	1	2	3
3	I couldn't seem to experience any positive feeling at all	0	1	2	3
4	I experienced breathing difficulty (eg, excessively rapid breathing, breathlessness in the absence of physical exertion)	0	1	2	3
5	I found it difficult to work up the initiative to do things	0	1	2	3
6	I tended to over-react to situations	0	1	2	3
7	I experienced trembling (eg, in the hands)	0	1	2	3
8	I felt that I was using a lot of nervous energy	0	1	2	3
9	I was worried about situations in which I might panic and make a fool of myself	0	1	2	3
10	I felt that I had nothing to look forward to	0	1	2	3
11	I found myself getting agitated	0	1	2	3
12	I found it difficult to relax	0	1	2	3
13	I felt down-hearted and blue	0	1	2	3
14	I was intolerant of anything that kept me from getting on with what I was doing	0	1	2	3

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15	I felt I was close to panic	0	1	2	3
16	I was unable to become enthusiastic about anything	0	1	2	3
17	I felt I wasn't worth much as a person	0	1	2	3
18	I felt that I was rather touchy	0	1	2	3
19	I was aware of the action of my heart in the absence of physical exertion (eg, sense of heart rate increase, heart missing a beat)	0	1	2	3
20	I felt scared without any good reason	0	1	2	3
21	I felt that life was meaningless	0	1	2	3

Appendix B: Interview Guide

Part 1: Interview guide for incest victims

This interview seeks to gather information from you about your experiences as a father – daughter incest victim. Bear in mind that your answers will neither be considered right nor wrong as such you are free to answer the questions in any way you want to. You can also choose not to answer the questions you are uncomfortable with. If at any point during the interview, you do not want to continue, please feel free to let me know. If during or after the interview you feel anxious or scared, please let me know. You are also at liberty to also ask me any questions that you have in mind at any point in the interview. Thank you for accepting to participate in this study.

Demographic Information: I would like to know more about you

1. How old are you?
2. What is your highest level of education?
3. What is your religious affiliation?
4. How many are you in your family?

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5. Do you have siblings, if yes how many are they?

6. What is your position of birth?

7. Where do you live currently?

Incest experiences

8. How old were you when the act first occurred?

9. Who was the perpetrator?

10. What was your relationship with the person before and after the act?

11. How close is your shared space?

12. Can you tell me what you think might have motivated the act? (Explore the following questions)

    What exactly happened?

    Where did it happen?

    How did it happen?

Life After the experience

13. Did you disclose the incidence?

    If yes-

    I) after how long and to whom?

    II) What was the person's reaction?

    III) What steps were taken to help you?

    IV) What support systems were provided to help you cope?

    V) What was done to the perpetrator?

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If no –

I) why did you not disclose it?

II) What have you been doing to help you cope with the situation?

III) What support systems have been available to help you cope?

IV) Tell me how you feel about those systems that are available to support you

14. How has life been for you after the incidence compared to before the incidence?
15. Tell me if there have been any significant changes in your life

Probe: How has this incidence affected you and what do you think accounts for this?

Non-Suicidal self-harming behaviour

16. Do you ever feel like hurting yourself without the intention of killing yourself because of the incidence? Tell me more about this.

Probe: Who have you reported this to?

17. Tell me what thought comes to your mind for such intention to self-harm

Debriefing

1. Tell me how you have felt during this interview
2. Are there any questions you want to ask me for clarification?
3. Tell me if there are other questions you wished I had asked
4. Tell me if this study could be useful to those who have experienced such distress moments**.**

Part 2: Interview Guide for key informants

I am a second-year master's student of university of Ghana, Legon. This study is in partial fulfillment of the requirement for a master's degree in Clinical Psychology**.** This interview seeks

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to gather information from you as a teacher/counsellor/ Girl Guide Coordinator about your knowledge, attitudes and perception about incest and explore your awareness of victims of the act in your school, how to identify them and how to help them. Please bear in mind that your answers will neither be considered right nor wrong as such you are free to answer the questions in any way you want to. You can also choose not to answer the questions you are uncomfortable with. If at any point during the interview, you do not want to continue, please feel free to let me know. You are also at liberty to also ask me any questions that you have in mind at any point in the interview. Thank you for accepting to participate in this study.

Demographic Information: I would like to know more about you

4 Are you male or female?

5 How old are you?

6 What is your highest level of education?

7 What is your religious affiliation?

8 Are you a permanent or temporary teacher?

9 How long have you been teaching?

10 How long have you been in this school?

11 What extra position do you hold in the school aside from being a teacher?

12 Can you tell me what you know about incest?

13 How will you react towards victims of incest and the perpetrators?

14 What do you think is the most appropriate form of sanction for the perpetrators?

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15 Are you willing to go all out to help sanction the perpetrators and protect the victim?

16 Do you have knowledge about the occurrence of this abuse in your school? How did you get to know?

17 Can you tell if a student is going through a form of distress?

18 What will you do/ or did you do if/when a student confides/confided in you about a case of sexual abuse especially incest?

19 Do you feel students can easily approach you with their problems? If yes why? If no why

20 Does your added role as a counsellor or girl coordinator or lack of it make it easier or more difficult for students to share their problems with you?

21 Apart from asking the government for help, do you feel you are equipped with enough resources in the form of skills and amenities to help these victims?

22 If you are not, what do you think can be done to help you?