

Perpetrators of Sexual Violence against Minors in Casamance (Senegal)

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Abstract

Introduction: The causes of sexual delinquency against children are multifactorial and the motivations that drive the perpetrators of sexual assault are diverse. Nowadays, there is still no consensus on a single portrait of child sex offenders and studies that focus on sex offenders are still rare in Senegal and Africa. **Objectives:** To determine the profile of the perpetrators and to identify the circumstances of sexual violence against minors in Casamance. **Materials and Methods:** A retrospective descriptive and analytical study from April 1, 2014 to October 31, 2019 was conducted. The study population was made up of perpetrators of sexual violence against minors whose legal proceedings were dealt with at the Ziguinchor High Court. The data were entered into an Excel spreadsheet and then analyzed using Epi Info™ 7 software. **Results:** A total of 106 cases of sexual violence against minors were collected for 113 aggressors and 106 victims. Rape accounted for 66.03% of sexual violence. Male aggressors were 98.23%. Female victims accounted for 95.28%. The average age of the attackers was 32.52 years (± 13.68). Offenders over the age of 35 committed the most rape ($p = 0.043$). The average age of the victims was 12.62 years (± 3.42). Victims aged ten and over ($p = 0.015$) and who had a low level of education ($p = 0.016$) were more exposed to rape. The assault took place during the day (65.71%) and at the home of the aggressor (62.26%). Victims knew their attackers (84.47%). Victims were assaulted more than once by the same assailant (40.57%). Those aged 10 years and over ($p = 0.0037$) and who knew their attackers ($p = 0.014$) were more at risk of being repeatedly sexually abused. **Conclusion:** In Senegal, sexual violence against minors is perpetrated by young adult men, single, with little or no education and exercising low-income professions. Rape is the type of aggression preferred by

perpetrators, most of whom were known to their victims. The policy to fight sexual violence against children must integrate sex education at school and community level, public awareness, monitoring of child sex offenders and possibly, their medico-psychological care.

Keywords

Sexual Violence, Minors, Aggressor, Casamance

1. Introduction

Sexual delinquency, being the act of committing sexual offenses, is a complex problem. Its causes are multifactorial and the motivations that drive the perpetrators of sexual assault are diverse [1]. Nowadays, there is still no consensus on a single portrait of child sex offender and the circumstances of the violence are still poorly understood. In Africa and particularly in Senegal, studies focusing on sex offenders are still rare. The objectives of our study were to determine the profile of the perpetrators and to identify the circumstances of sexual violence against minors in Casamance.

2. Materials and Methods

This is a retrospective descriptive and analytical study from April 1st, 2014 to October 31st, 2019. Our study focused on the perpetrators of sexual violence against minors whose legal consequences had been dealt with at the level of the high court of Ziguinchor.

We first identified the cases of sexual violence against minors at the court level from the correctional registers and the court records. Then, we collected the data from court records using a form that had been developed, tested, then corrected and validated.

The data were entered into an Excel spreadsheet and then exported to Epi Info™ 7 for analysis. The actual analysis consisted of a presentation of the proportions and a cross-referencing of the variables and the output variables. The associations were assessed by the Chi² test at the 5% level of significance.

3. Results

3.1. Descriptive Study

In total, out of 106 legal files relating to sexual violence against minors collected at the Ziguinchor High Court, we found 113 aggressors and 106 victims.

Among the 113 identified perpetrators, men represented 98.23% (n = 111) with a sex ratio of 56.5. The ages of the aggressors ranged from 13 to 73 years old. The average age was 32.52 years with a standard deviation of 13.68. The most represented age was 23 years old. Young adults aged 18 - 35 represented 58.41% (n = 66).

The marital status of the aggressors was documented in 92 files (81.42%). The perpetrators were single in 70.41% of cases ($n = 69$), married in 26.53% ($n = 26$) and divorced in 3.06% of cases ($n = 3$). The educational level of the aggressors, informed in 63 files (55.75%), gave the following result: 41.27% ($n = 26$) uneducated and 58.73% ($n = 37$) educated (**Table 1**).

The occupation of the aggressors was provided for 109 of them (96.46%). The latter were mostly workers (15.60%; $n = 17$) or drivers and apprentice drivers (15.60%; $n = 17$) (**Figure 1**).

Female victims represented 95.28% ($n = 101$) with a sex ratio of 0.05. The average age was 12.62 years with a standard deviation of 3.42, a variance of 11.7 and extremes of 3 and 17 years. The most represented age (mode) was 15 years old. The vast majority of victims, 74.53% ($n = 79$), were adolescents between the ages of 12 and 17.

The educational level of the victims was specified in 72 cases (67.92%). Of these victims, 8.33% ($n = 6$) were out of school (**Table 2**).

The family environment of the victims was informed in 91 files (85.85%). Fifty-six victims (61.54%) lived with both parents, 17.58% ($n = 16$) with only one parent (father or mother) and 20.88% ($n = 19$) with a relative.

Table 1. Distribution of aggressors according to level of education.

| Educational level | Workforce | Percentage | Cumulative Percentage |
|-------------------|-----------|------------|-----------------------|
| Not in school | 26 | 41.27% | 41.27% |
| Koranic school | 5 | 7.94% | 49.21% |
| Primary | 7 | 11.11% | 60.32% |
| Medium | 9 | 14.29% | 74.61% |
| Secondary | 13 | 20.63% | 95.24% |
| High school | 3 | 4.76% | 100.00% |
| Total | 63 | 100.00% | 100.00% |

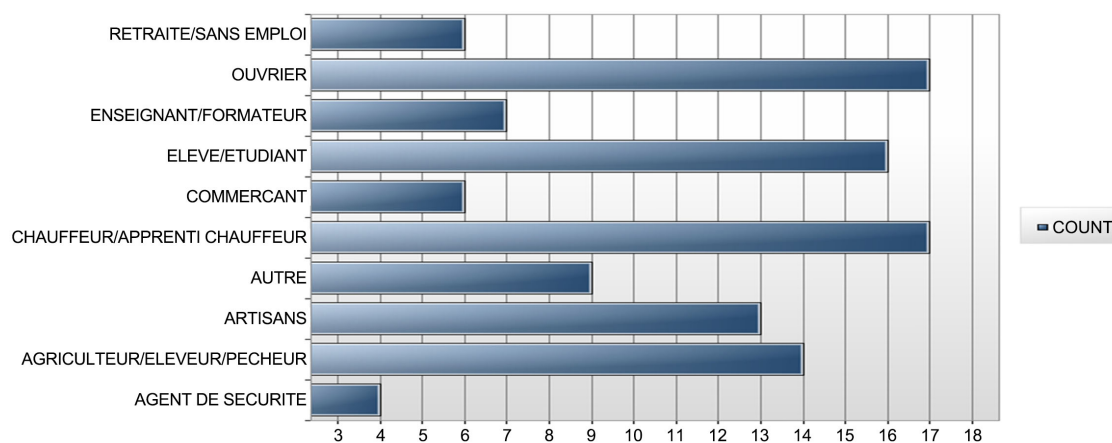


Figure 1. Distribution of aggressors by Profession.

Table 2. Distribution of victims according to school level.

| Educational level | Workforce | Percentage | Cumulative Percentage |
|-------------------|-----------|----------------|-----------------------|
| Not in school | 6 | 8.33% | 8.33% |
| Koranic school | 2 | 2.78% | 11.11% |
| Preschool | 2 | 2.78% | 13.89% |
| Primary | 38 | 52.78% | 66.67% |
| Medium | 23 | 31.94% | 98.61% |
| Secondary | 1 | 1.39% | 100.00% |
| Total | 72 | 100.00% | 100.00% |

The socio-economic level of the victims' family was provided in 48 files (45.28%) of which 93.75% ($n = 45$) had a low level and 6.25% ($n = 3$) a medium level.

The time of the sexual assault specified in 105 files (99.06%) revealed that the assaults took place during the day in 65.71% ($n = 69$) of the cases. The distribution according to the location of the assault is shown in **Figure 2**.

Regarding the type of sexual violence, rape accounted for 66.03% of cases ($n = 70$) (**Table 3**).

The link between the victim and the aggressor was specified in 103 files, *i.e.* 97.17%, and in 84.47% of the cases ($n = 87$) the victim knew his aggressor.

Of the victims, 91.51% ($n = 97$) indicated a single assailant. The rest were gang assaulted by two (5.66%; $n = 6$) or three (2.83%; $n = 3$) aggressors. Violence associated with sexual assault is recorded in **Table 4**.

Sixty-three victims (59.43%) experienced a single assault against 40.57% ($n = 43$) who experienced the assault more than once from the aggressor.

3.2. Analytical Study

3.2.1. Bivariate Analysis

There was a statistically significant link between the age of the victims, their level of education, the age of the aggressor and the occurrence of rape. The age of the victim and the acquaintance of the aggressor were also significantly related to the repetition of sexual violence. The studied factors and their respective p-values are shown in **Table 5** and **Table 6**.

3.2.2. Multivariate Analysis

Minors aged 10 or over had the highest risk of being raped [adjusted OR = 18.08 (2.08 - 157.00)]. It is also this age group that was more at risk of experiencing repeated sexual violence from the same aggressor [adjusted OR = 5.40 (1.12 - 26.09)]. Victims who had a low level of education (*i.e.* uneducated or of preschool or primary level) were more exposed to rape [adjusted OR = 17.58 (2.60 - 118.98)]. The results are shown in **Table 7** and **Table 8**.

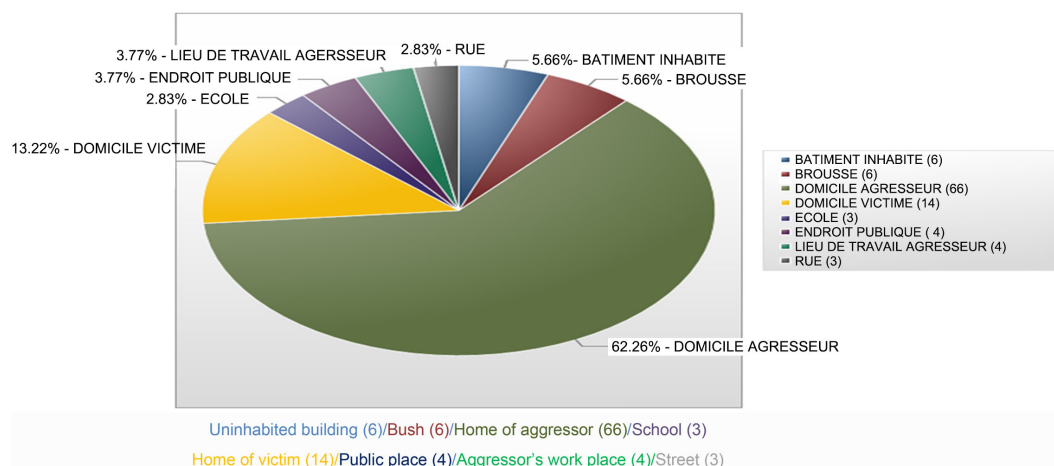


Figure 2. Distribution of victims by location of assault.

Table 3. Distribution of victims according to the type of sexual violence suffered.

| Type of sexual violence | Workforce | Percentage | Cumulative Percentage |
|---------------------------------|------------|----------------|-----------------------|
| Rape ± Other charges | 70 | 66.03% | 66.03% |
| Attempted rape | 12 | 11.32% | 77.35% |
| Abduction of a minor | 11 | 10.38% | 87.73% |
| Sexual touching ± Other charges | 11 | 10.38% | 98.11% |
| Molestation | 2 | 1.89% | 100.00% |
| Total | 106 | 100.00% | 100.00% |

Table 4. Distribution of victims according to the form of associated violence.

| Association with other forms of violence | Workforce | Percentage |
|--|------------|----------------|
| Not reported | 56 | 52.83% |
| Reported | 50 | 47.17% |
| Total | 106 | 100.00% |
| Associated forms of violence | Workforce | Percentage |
| Verbal abuse | 33 | 31.13% |
| Physical violence | 23 | 21.70% |
| Psychological violence | 6 | 5.66% |

Table 5. Factors associated with repeat sexual violence

| Features | Terms | Yes | Nope | P | OR (IC 95) |
|------------------------------|-----------|-------------|-------------|---------|-------------------|
| | | N (%) | N (%) | | |
| Victim's age | ≥10 years | 40 (46.51%) | 46 (53.49%) | 0.0037* | 7.4 (1.6 - 34) |
| | <10 years | 2 (10.53%) | 17 (89.47%) | | |
| Place familiar to the victim | Yes | 8 (47.06%) | 9 (52.94%) | 0.52 | |
| | Nope | 34 (38.64%) | 54 (61.36%) | | |
| Link to aggressor | Known | 39 (45.35%) | 47 (54.65%) | 0.014* | 0.17 (0.04 - 0.8) |
| | Unknown | 2 (12.50%) | 14 (87.50%) | | |

*: statistically significant link.

Table 6. Factors associated with the occurrence of rape.

| Features | Terms | Yes | Nope | P | OR (IC 95) |
|-------------------------|-----------|-----------------------------|-------------|-------|------------------|
| | | Workforce (%) Workforce (%) | | | |
| VICTIMS | | | | | |
| Age | ≥10 years | 62 (71.26%) | 25 (28.74%) | 0.01* | 3.41 (1.2 - 9.5) |
| | <10 years | 8 (42.11%) | 11 (57.89%) | | |
| Lives with both parents | Yes | 40 (71.43%) | 16 (28.57%) | 0.57 | |
| | Nope | 23 (65.71%) | 12 (34.29%) | | |
| Low level of education | Yes | 36 (78.26%) | 10 (21.74%) | 0.01* | 3.6 (1.2 - 10.4) |
| | Nope | 12 (50.00%) | 12 (50.00%) | | |
| Link to aggressor | Known | 61 (70.11%) | 26 (29.89%) | 0.11 | |
| | Unknown | 8 (50.00%) | 8 (50.00%) | | |
| AGRESSORS | | | | | |
| Age | >35 years | 30 (78.95%) | 8 (21.05%) | 0.04* | 2.5 (1.0 - 6.2) |
| | ≤35 years | 45 (60.00%) | 30 (40.00%) | | |
| Married | Yes | 20 (76.92%) | 6 (23.08%) | 0.27 | |
| | None | 47 (65.28%) | 25 (34.72%) | | |
| No instruction: | Yes | 19 (73.08%) | 7 (26.92%) | 0.81 | |
| | Nope | 28 (75.68%) | 9 (24.32%) | | |

*: statistically significant link.

Table 7. The determinants of the occurrence of rape.

| Features | Terms | Adjusted OR (IC 95) |
|-------------------------|-----------|------------------------|
| VICTIMS | | |
| Age | ≥10 years | 18.08 (2.08 - 157.00)* |
| | <10 years | |
| Lives with both parents | Yes | 1.23 (0.31 - 4.91) |
| | Nope | |
| Low level of education | Yes | 17.58 (2.60 - 118.98)* |
| | Nope | |
| Link to aggressor | Known | 5.45 (0.67 - 44.57) |
| | Unknown | |
| AGRESSORS | | |
| Age | >35 years | 2.68 (0.86 - 8.39) |
| | ≤35 years | |
| Married | Yes | 1.26 (0.41 - 3.84) |
| | Nope | |

*: statistically significant link.

Table 8. The determinants of the repetition of sexual violence.

| Features | Terms | Adjusted OR (IC 95) |
|------------------------------|-----------|----------------------|
| Victim's age | ≥10 years | 5.40 (1.12 - 26.09)* |
| | <10 years | |
| Place familiar to the victim | Yes | 1.54 (0.46 - 5.16) |
| | Nope | |
| Link to aggressor | Known | 4.41 (0.91 - 21.42) |
| | Unknown | |

*: statistically significant link.

4. Discussion

The average age of the aggressors was 32.52 years, with extremes of 13 and 73 years. There was a predominance of young adults aged 18 to 35 (58.41%; n = 66). This predominance of young aggressors is also found in other studies. In Diémé's study in Dakar [2], the aggressor was on average 32 years old, the age varying between 10 and 60 years and in that of Bah in Conakry [3], 66.7% of aggressors were between 16 and 35 years old. This can be explained by the fact that it is at this age that sex drives are strongest and that sexual interest gradually decreases with age [4]. However, there was a statistically significant link between the age of the aggressor and the occurrence of rape. Victims were more at risk of being raped when the perpetrator was over 35 years old (p = 0.043). This could be due to the large age difference resulting in greater vulnerability of victims.

In our study, underage sexual offenders represented 7.96% (n = 9) of the perpetrators of sexual violence. The proportion of adolescents involved in sexual assault is increasing [5] [6]. Thus, according to Haesevoets, these adolescents "lack reliable references and/or suffer from social disengagement, but most have been victims of abuse of various kinds (psychological, physical or sexual) within their family circle." [6]. At the societal level, weak parental control and early access of young people to knowledge of sexual practices (via the uncontrolled dissemination of pornographic content, for example), may explain the acting out of these adolescents.

The aggressors were male in 98.23% of cases (n = 111). This is consistent with many other studies in Senegal and beyond [7] [8] with 99.4% - 100% male perpetrators. However, many authors agree that women perpetrators of sexual violence are not so uncommon [9] [10]. Sy, in Dakar (2011) found a higher proportion of abusive women than in our study (13.60%) [11]. Societal stereotypes about women's sexuality may explain the under-reporting of sexual violence perpetrated by women. Moreover, since the main care of the child is provided by the woman, certain abusive acts may be disguised as care and therefore go unnoticed.

Singles accounted for 70.41% (n = 69) of aggressors in our study, compared to 26.53% (n = 26) of married and 3.06% (n = 3) of divorced ones. Single people

would thus be the most disposed to practices of sexual assault. Diallo and al in Conakry, made the same observation with 72.28% of single perpetrators [8], as did Léye and al in Kolda (72.2%) [12]. Among the factors found in child sex offenders, the authors identified negative affective states such as loneliness, isolation, lack of adequate relationships with partners of the same age. These aggressors would find “comfort in relationships with children who are passive, dependent, psychologically less threatening than adults, and easily manipulated” [13].

The aggressors were uneducated in 41.27% of the cases ($n = 26$). Educated aggressors therefore represented 58.73% of cases ($n = 37$), including 7.94% ($n = 5$) in the Koranic school and 50.79% ($n = 32$) in the modern school. Of these, 20.63% had a secondary level. Our results go against those of previous studies in Senegal in which most perpetrators had a low level of education, in particular the studies of Savy and Léye with respectively 58.23% and 67.3% of non-criminal perpetrators. Educated [9] [12].

Nearly half of the perpetrators in our study, 47.71% ($n = 52$), had low-income occupations (drivers/trainee drivers, laborers, farmers/herders/fishermen, security guards). Pupils and students represented 14.68% ($n = 16$) and 5.50% ($n = 6$) were retired or unemployed. In Gabon, the majority of sex offenders came from a disadvantaged social background and 46.2% were unemployed or seeking employment [14]. The precarious socio-economic conditions, unemployment, have a certain influence on the passage to the act [13] [15]. In addition, more than a quarter of attacks were committed by artisans, shopkeepers, teachers/trainers, tailors, photographers or healers. They are individuals who, through their jobs, are very often in contact with children.

The victims of child sex offenders were mainly composed of girls with 95.28% of cases ($n = 101$). These results are identical to those of other studies carried out at national [9] [11] [12] and international [5] [16] [17] [18] levels in which girls represented between 84.70% and 99.4%. Girls are thus more vulnerable to sexual violence [15] [19]. However, sexual violence against boys is not rare. Priebe reports in his series that 23% of boys are victims of sexual violence [10]. This under-representation of boys in our study could be explained by the fact that boys report fewer acts of sexual violence [20]. The age of the victims in our series varied between 3 and 17 years. The victims were on average 12.62 ± 3.42 years old with a predominance of adolescent girls aged 12 to 17 (74.53%; $n = 79$). This age group is marked by puberty, which begins around the age of 10.5 years on average in girls [21]. The body of the adolescent is in full mutation with the appearance of secondary sexual characteristics. The young girl thus becomes the object of attraction of the adults and the young aggressors.

Among the 72 victims for whom the educational level was informed, 8.33% were not educated ($n = 6$). The educational level was relatively low with 52.78% of the victims having a primary level ($n = 38$). Victims with no education or with a low level of education experienced more rape ($p = 0.016$). Our results are similar to those obtained in Dakar [9] and Lomé [16] with respectively 45.88% and

60% of victims having a primary level. The “sexual taboo” noted in Senegalese society and the low level of education of the victims means that they have not benefited from sexual education at the family and/or school level, which makes them vulnerable in front of the aggressors.

Victims of abusers in our study were living with a single parent in 17.58% of cases ($n = 16$) and in “fostering” in 20.88% of cases ($n = 19$).

Sy in Dakar obtained 11.50% of entrusted victims and 7.6% in single-parent families [11]. According to Meydan [5] living in a single-parent family, being entrusted to another family or placed in a foster home would increase the risk of exposure to sexual violence.

Forty-five victims (93.75%) belonged to families of low socio-economic level. This result confirms those obtained in studies conducted in Senegal [2] [22] [23] and internationally [5] [10] [24]. The socio-economic precariousness of the victims’ families. The small jobs carried out by children expose them to sexual abuse from their employers or clients.

Referring to the circumstances in which child molesters operate, 65.71% ($n = 69$) of victims were abused in the daytime period when parents are preoccupied with other tasks. Léye and Meka had made the same observation with respectively 53.4% and 74.5% of victims assaulted during the day [12] [25] unlike Soumah who had obtained, in his study in Gabon, 67.5% of sexual abuses committed at night [14].

The results of our study reveal that child sex aggressors acted outside the family circle of the victim. This was most often the abuser’s home or workplace in 62.26% ($n = 66$) and 3.77% ($n = 4$) of cases, respectively. These results are similar to those of Léye in Kolda [12] and Savy in Dakar [9] where the sexual assault took place in the home of the aggressor in respectively 53.1% and 72.47% of cases. According to some authors (Dupont and al; Diémé and al), the aggressor baits his victim and lures him to an isolated place where the call for help will not be heard [2] [7].

Regarding the clinical aspects of the sexual violence perpetrated by the aggressors, rape was the type most reported by the victims with 66.03% of the cases ($n = 70$). Studies, such as those of Cissé and al, in Dakar which obtained 61% of rape cases [26], of Diallo and al, in Conakry with 72.10% [8], of Meka and al, in Yaoundé with 85.1% [25] and Dupont and al in, France with 79% [7], have confirmed this predominance of rape over other types of sexual violence. However, these results may not reflect reality if we know that certain types of sexual assault are tolerated by our societies. They are therefore less often the subject of complaints and/or medical consultations.

The aggressors were known to their victims in 84.47% of the cases ($n = 87$) which makes us say that, contrary to popular beliefs, the aggressor belongs to the direct entourage of the child. It is most often a person who has the confidence of the child.

The sexual violence was the act of a single aggressor in 91.51% of the cases ($n = 97$). Collective sexual assaults were uncommon in our study. Higher rates were

found in Mali with 34.46% collective attacks [27]. Sexual aggression is often a sign of virility in the group, and is strongly linked to the desire to be held in high esteem [28].

In our study, the victims had experienced another form of violence in 47.17% of cases (n = 50). The most common form of coercion used by the abuser was verbal abuse. Our results are higher than those of Sy in Dakar, *i.e.* 27.10% of verbal and/or physical violence [11]. However, they are lower than those of Méka in Yaoundé, which reported respectively 57.4% verbal violence and 25.5% physical violence [25].

Of the victims, 40.57% (n = 43) had alleged that they had been assaulted more than once by the same assailant. These were most often victims who knew their attackers (p = 0.014) and who were over the age of 10 (p = 0.0037). This can be explained by the fact that the physical damage left by sexual violence is greater in young girls [19].

5. Conclusions

At the end of our study, a profile of perpetrators of sexual violence against minors emerges. These are young adult men, single, with little or no education and working in low-income professions. These child sex abusers operate outside the family circle of their victims and in daylight. Rape is the type of aggression preferred by perpetrators, most of whom were known to their victims.

In Senegal, sex education must be a priority for families and child protection services, in short, for all actors in society. Raising public awareness, monitoring and possibly medico-psychological care of child sex offenders must be included in policies to fight sexual violence.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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