

# Parents' perspectives on Child Abuse and Neglect

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# Background

- Consensus that Child Abuse and Neglect (CAN) has reached epidemic proportions in SA (Africa Check, 2014, Meinck et al., 2016, Petersen et al., 2005, Richter and Dawes, 2008, Jewkes et al., 2010a)
- Despite many protective instruments SA is signatory to, such as:
  - South African Constitution
  - United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child
  - African Charter on the Rights & Welfare of the Child
- In light of high prevalence of CAN & irreversibility of adverse childhood experiences (O'Connor and Cailin, 2012), prevention is important.
- Important to understand parents' perspectives of CAN for their participation in prevention efforts

# Objectives

- Aim: To explore how to optimize community participation (CP) in CAN prevention programmes in Protea Glen (PG), Soweto
- Objectives included:
  - To describe how community members perceive CAN in PG, in 2017/8
  - To describe the community's own perspective on CP in
    - General in PG
    - COPESSA CAN Prevention Programmes, over the same period
- Question: How do community members perceive CAN in PG?

# Methodology

- **Design:** Qualitative case study with ethics approval
- **Setting :** COPESSA, a CAN Centre in PG
- **Study Population:** PG community members for at least 3 years & > 18 years
- **Sample:** 32 purposively sampled participants
  - Mix of those who have participated in COPESSA CAN prevention programmes + those who have never
- **Data collection:** 3 focus & 2 group discussions in 2017 (recorded)
- **Analysis:** Thematic analysis of independently translated & transcribed transcripts used MAXQDA software



# Results

- **Knowledge:** Correct and nuanced knowledge of definitions and types of CAN among all participants
- Knowledge and attitudes mismatch

## Example of internal dissonance:

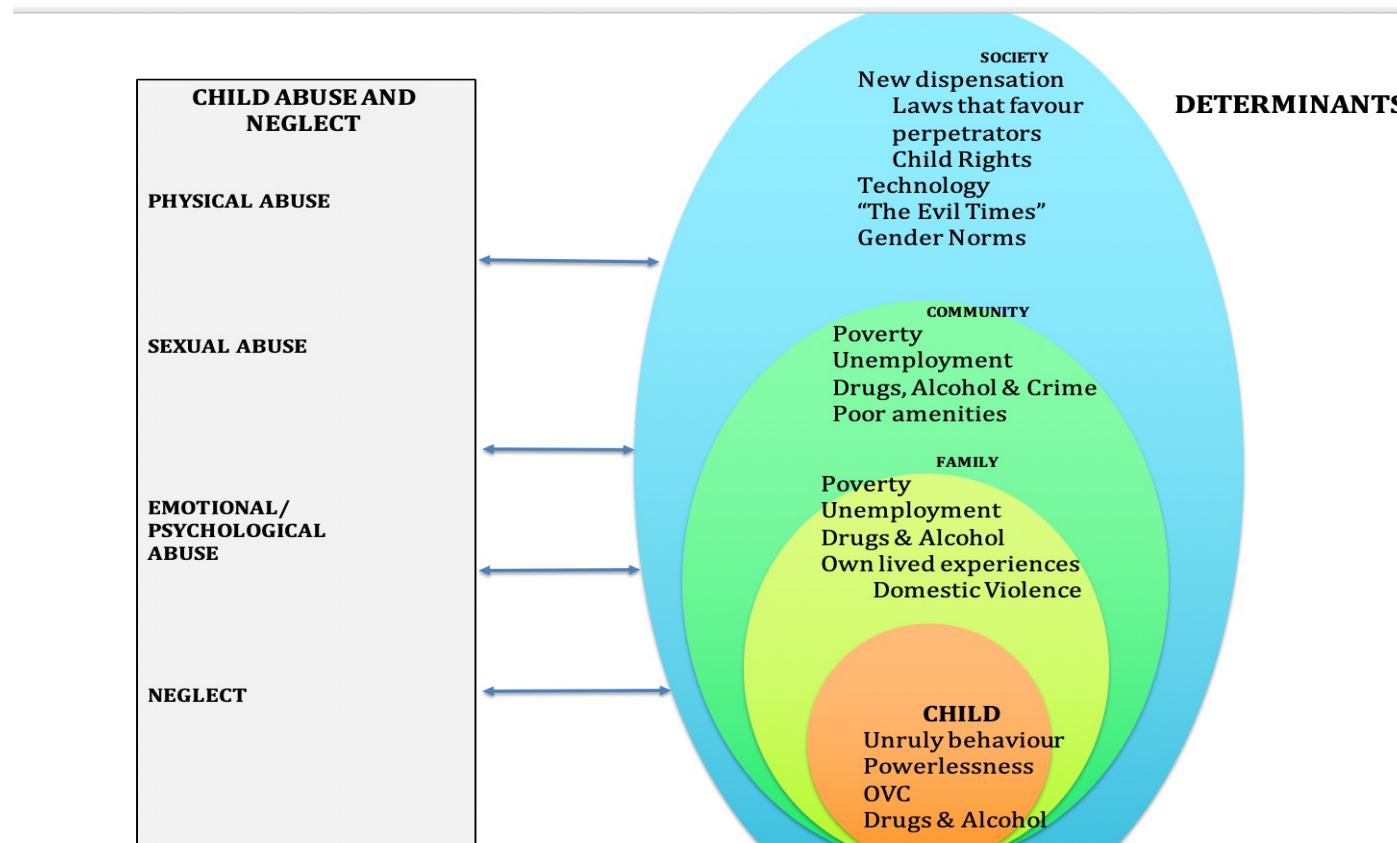
*“Another mistake by the Government is that the Constitution of the country states that children have rights and a child has a right to receive support and protection from the parent. Those rights are now a challenge in schools and children exercise them... You see, these are the things that cause children to suffer... it is a massive load. This helpless child gets abused that way.”* (E, female, FGD1)

## Results - continued

- **Abuse:** physical abuse most commonly described than other types, especially sexual abuse
- **Neglect:** physical needs raised than emotional needs.
- Conflation of discipline and physical abuse of children:
  - Own childhood experiences as frame of reference

*"So as parents, sometimes you just tell yourself, this child has gotten out of hand. What do I do?...We are responsible citizens because we were beaten. But today as C is talking about biblical times, the Bible says: "spare the rod and spoil the child."... We are being overpowered and threatened by our children and our government, and that causes frustration. That frustration causes abuse on children and when the government sees what is happening in the families, they call it abuse. We call it abuse. We call it discipline, they call it abuse!"(Rhino, male, FGD1)*

# Results continued – Social Determinants of CAN



# Discussion

- **Distrust in “rights” discourse**
  - Cultural norms: 9 /10 men and women experience physical punishment before age 18 years Jewkes et al, 2010a
  - Religious beliefs: religion tends to be very important to parents who abuse children Jackson et al, 2009
- **Cultural Relativism:** shapes the attitudes to CAN and rationalizes the way parents discipline their children
- Reluctance to talk about sexual abuse:
  - Common in indigenous cultures who consider these issues as private & taboo Wamoyi et al, 2010; Muhwezi et al, 2015

# Discussion continued

- **Fatalism:** a coping strategy, often linked to poverty, with negative implications, such as:
  - Outsourcing of personal responsibility
  - Powerlessness
  - Lack of Investment in the future (Bernard et al, 2011, Scott, 2001)
    - → Poor protection and guidance of children

# Conclusion and Recommendations

- **How can was perceived:**
  - mostly negative sentiments
  - largely attributed to factors extraneous to caregivers
- **Participation:** Apply more bottom-up approaches to encourage caregiver buy-in
- **Policy:** DSD needs to fast-track the abolishment of physical or corporal punishment in homes
- **Programming:**
  - Implement rights-based positive parenting programmes to address fatalism and knowledge-attitude mismatch
  - Enlist institutions such as churches to endorse rights-based parenting practices

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