

## **Multidisciplinary Forensic Interview with Alleged Child Sexual Abuse and Its Challenges in Selected Units in Addis Ababa**

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### **Abstract**

*This study examined multidisciplinary forensic interview of alleged child sexual abuse and its challenges in Addis Ababa. To this end, qualitative research approach together with purposive sampling technique was employed. Seven investigative police officers, three public prosecutors, three social workers and four individuals who are in administration position at the selected units: a total of 17 individuals participated in this study. In-depth interview with the police, social workers and prosecutors and key informant interview with the administrators were employed. Pertinent documents were consulted and thematic analysis was also used. Though there is some sort of work relationship with the police, public prosecutors, health professionals and social workers that designates multidisciplinary team (MDT) forensic interview, the study unveiled the recurring challenges of the MDT forensic interview. Amongst others, the challenges included wrong perception about each other's role in the forensic interview process, role conflict and lack of cooperation among the professionals, duplication of interview, absence of law that regulates each agency or professional involved in the interview process and limited number of social workers in the units. These challenges made conducting successful MDT forensic interview in the selected units difficult. In view of these, the researcher suggests that there should be a law that regulates and spells out each agency's role in interview process. There should also be joint training schemes and communication mechanism.*

Keywords: Child Forensic Interview, Criminal Investigation, Forensic Investigation,

### **1Introduction**

Successful forensic interview hinges on obtaining reliable evidence from alleged child sexual abuse. The results of forensic interview may be helpful for child protection decision, criminal charges decision, and therapeutic and supportive intervention decisions. As child sexual abuse case is multifarious problem, it requires collaboration of various institutions. Henceforth, forensic interview of sexually abused children is conducted in a multidisciplinary team (MDT) approach which consists of professionals that are a part of the crime investigation and responsible for the victim child protection. Most of the time, members of the team include investigative police, social

workers, prosecutors, mental health and medical professionals (Bracewell, 2015; Newlin et al., 2015).

A number of international legal and infra-legal instruments have been developed to guide the members of MDT working in the child sexual abuse investigation. Ethiopia is a party to most of these legal instruments including the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR); the 1966 International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR); the 1989 Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC); and the 1990 African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACRWC). In response to the protection and investigation of child abuses, Ethiopia is also an active participant in formulating and adopting various global standards and established institutions. In addition to the general human right provisions proclaimed under its Chapter Three, the 1995 Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia Constitution (here in after FDRE Constitution) devotes a full article totally to the rights of a child. The Ethiopian government tried to uphold the CRC's best interest of the child principle under the 1995 FDRE Constitution, the 2011 Criminal Justice Policy, and the 2017 National Children Policy. But the realization of the principle regarding sexually abused child remains challenging in the criminal justice system (Tsegaye, 2011; Getnet, 2000).

In Ethiopia, there is no research that examined MDT forensic interview of child alleged of sexual abuse and its challenges. This is in particular true with regard to Gandhi Memorial Hospital, Arada and Yeka Women and Children Protection and Investigation Units where this study is focused. To this end, qualitative research method is employed. Both primary and secondary data sources have been consulted.

## **2 Methodology**

The study employed case study qualitative research approach. As it allows for the possibility of gaining significant knowledge about the problem under scrutiny, this study used case study approach (Yin, 2003). The study setting is also selected purposefully since the researcher believes the participants to have adequate knowledge of the subject to achieve research objectives. The researcher collects data from the respondents with better knowledge and experience about the problem (Creswell, 2007).

Both primary and secondary data sources were used to collect pertinent data. In-depth interview with the seven (7) investigative police officers, three (3) social workers and three (3) public prosecutors and four (4) key informant interview with individuals who are in administration position were conducted. The in-depth interview participants mainly shared their work relationship and associated problems encountered in the interview process. Secondary data sources such as domestic normative and policy frameworks, international and regional legal and infra-legal instruments have also been used. Moreover, books, articles, reliable website sources were consulted.

### **3 General Overview of MDT Forensic Interview of Child Alleged of Sexual Abuse**

#### **3.1 Historical Context of MDT in Addis Ababa**

Child forensic interview by specially trained professionals such as the police, social workers and public prosecutors was initiated with the establishment of child protection units from the mid-1990s. The units mainly provide services for children who are alleged of sexual abuse. The Forum on Street Children Ethiopia and Addis Ababa Police Commission setup unit pilot projects at five selected Addis Ababa police stations. Based on the lessons drawn from the pilot projects the unit model expanded to other police stations in Addis Ababa and major regional state towns of Ethiopia (Tsegaye, 2011; UNICEF, 2005).

The main reasons to setup the units include magnitude of child sexual abuse, lack of awareness about the problem of the abuse by professionals and absence of the systems necessary to deal with child related cases including child sexual abuse. Consequently, creating awareness and sensitizing the senior police leaders regarding child abuses was necessary. Police officers assigned to the unit were given six weeks training on legal, operational and psychological aspects of their job. In the meantime social workers, psychologists and legal experts were also hired. The primary responsibility of police was interviewing of child alleged of sexual abuse (Tsegaye, 2011; UNICEF, 2005).

Currently, the 10 sub cities of Addis Ababa City Administration have about 10 women and children investigation and protection units: namely, Arada, Yeka, Kirkos, Gulele, Kolfe, Addis Ketema, Bole, Akaki Kaliti, Nifas Silk Lafto and Lideta. Ten of the units are based within the sub city police stations' compound and one of them is situated at the Gandhi Memorial Hospital. Meanwhile, the three units which are the focus of this study are Gandhi Memorial Hospital Women

and Children Integrated Care and Justice Center (here in after unit), Arada and Yeka units. The units are required to provide and facilitate specialized services of protection and investigation of abused children. The selected units are under Addis Ababa Police Commission Women and Children Investigation and Protection Coordination office (Statistical Report of Addis Ababa Police Commission, 2018).

### **3.2 Crime and Forensic Investigation**

The definition of the scope of the concept of crime investigation like that of forensic investigation is a major problem as it can be defined either in a narrow or broad way. Thus, there is no universally acceptable definition of both concepts. However, there are few model definitions available. The common definition of crime investigation is the process of unearthing the truth (Smith, 2013, p. 12). According to Hess and Orthmann (2010), criminal investigation is the method used to discover, collect, prepare, identify and present proof for deciding the crime and the perpetrator. Crime investigation, also known as criminal investigation, is the process of lawfully gathering information or evidence of crime that has been or about to be committed until the culprit is either convicted or acquitted in the court (Smith, 2013). Similarly, Gehl and Plecas (2016) well-defined crime investigation as “a broad term encompassing a wide range of specialties that aim to determine how events occurred, and to establish an evidence-based fact pattern to prove the guilt or innocence of an accused person in a criminal event” (p.12).

Forensic investigation on the other hand refers to analytical methods of specific science and the application of modern technological clues (Kennedy, 2006; Smith, 2013). The term forensic refers to any matter which has relevance to prove a criminal, civil or administrative cases before the court of law or administrative tribunal. It is a scientific test or technique used in connection with the investigation of crime to provide relevant evidence to the court (Kennedy, 2006; Michael, 2008; Smith, 2013). The role of forensic investigation entails procession from the collection of evidence to the presentation of scientific findings in court of law. Whilst the forensic expert analyses, evaluates and explains the evidence, the detection, collection, and preservation thereof is the responsibility of the crime investigator. The forensic expert is not there only to analyze and interpret evidence but also can challenge a court as expert witness testimony. As Smith argued, investigation is both science and art. Hence, both criminal and forensic investigations are primarily envisioned for identifying and bringing offenders to the court of law (2013).

Child forensic interview is one of tools of investigation used to obtain information or evidence from the child suspected of abuse or witness for decision making in the criminal justice and child welfare services (Sumampouw et al., 2019). Faller (2007) in this context described the term forensics as an application of scientific principles and techniques to the legal problem to acquire information from a child alleged of abuse. The interview in turn helps the professional to provide expert testimony in court of law. Newlain et al. (2015) put child forensic interview in relatively comprehensive way as:

A forensic interview of a child is a developmentally sensitive and legally sound method of gathering factual information regarding allegations of abuse or exposure to violence. This interview is conducted by a competently trained, neutral professional utilizing research and practice-informed techniques as part of a larger investigative process (p. 3).

This definition entails that forensic interviewer of child alleged of abuse is required to consider child developmental level and legality of the techniques of obtaining information regarding the allegation of abuse. Not only fair trial but also sensitive manner of interview is required in the child forensic interview process. Likewise, the professional who conducts this interview is expected to be neutral and able to apply research and practice-informed methods.

### **3.3 Theoretical Framework: Multidisciplinary Team Approach**

Forensic interview of child alleged of sexual abuse is conducted in a MDT approach. This is due to the fact that child sexual abuse is a multifaceted problem henceforth single institution has no all-inclusive resource to effectively intervene child abuse cases (Meyer and Mukherjee, 2017; Tsegaye, 2011). As MDT interviews are conducted in a more thorough and accurate approach, it has the potential to protect both the child and the accused (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNDOC), 2009). Though determined by the rule that governs the team members and the nature of case, MDT forensic interview typically involves police, social workers, prosecutors, mental health and medical professionals (Newlin et al., 2015; Bracewell, 2015). MDT is part of children's advocacy center where there is specially designed child friendlier setting that forensic interview, medical examinations and treatment services is undertaken. The setting where the team conducts forensic interview is "one-stop" center that carries out medical assessment, investigation and treatment of child abuse in one roof (U.S. Department of Justice, 2000). In the unit, a trained interviewer collects information from the child whereas other team members watch through either a one-way mirror or closed-circuit television. There are also teams in child advocacy centers that do not provide comprehensive service mostly found in hospitals, prosecutors' offices and within

child protective services agencies. Apart from these, there are teams that are not part of child advocacy center and do not have special interview settings. However, they use resources that reduce trauma on victims and families, improve the accuracy of information obtained during the investigation and lessen the strain on investigators. Irrespective of where the interview is undertaken, the interviewer should communicate with the team members in the interview process on issues pertinent to the child abuse case (U.S. Department of Justice, 2000; Faller, 2015).

MDT forensic interview, *inter alia*, limit duplicative of interview with the child, child-friendlier settings for investigation, promote proper and expedient collection of evidences and increase public awareness about the child sexual abuse (Bracewell, 2015). However, the success of child justice relies on the coordination of various institutions. Forensic interview of child alleged of sexual abuse that coordinates investigation from several backgrounds has efficient outcome (Meyer and Mukherjee, 2017). On this regard, the U.S Department of Justice (2000) put that:

The MDT approach often extends beyond joint investigations and interagency coordination into team decision making. Team investigations require the full participation and collaboration of team members, who share their knowledge, skills, and abilities. Team members remain responsible for fulfilling their own professional roles while learning to take others' roles and responsibilities into consideration (p. 6).

Collaboration for the purpose of this study is defined as a process and an outcome to promote effective child protection among forensic interviewers. It is an effective and efficient service delivery approach that helps to address the needs of complex and multiple problems of beneficiaries in a comprehensive way. Further, it is also a two way relationship where both sides stand by their own, having equal contribution for the required result. Conversely, supportive in a team forensic interview process means an assistant for the other. This, supportive role has little contribution for the required result (Kisthardt, 2005; U.S. Department of Justice, 2000).

Conflict is, however, likely to occur in a MDT forensic interview practice. This is mainly due the fact that who could be involved in the interview process has different goals, views, role overlay and confidentiality issues (Beran, 2005). Moreover, distrust, communication problems, lack of respect, conflict over power and the like are normal to happen in the MDT forensic interview that involves police and social workers (Han et al., 2008; Beran, 2005). Another study also found that there is tension between police and social workers in the child justice process. Each blames over the role one plays. Social workers are considered as incompetent to deal with the child while the police are considered as insensitive in dealing with child related cases (Lucas and Jongman, 2017).

Although the law requires the social workers to provide expert recommendation to the court, it is misconstrued by judge believing that usurpation of their powers to pass judgment on matters before the court. In Logos for example, social workers have no any role in policy and legislative process and even their role in the child justice professes is not stated (Lucas and Jongman, 2017). In Ethiopia, coordination among various government agencies as regards protection of children in different settings is found to be haphazard and frustrating. In particular, the cooperation among the police, public prosecution, court and social services agencies, in handling abused children is poor (Getnet, 2000; Tsegaye, 2011).

In summary, the role of social workers in the area of child protection and investigation are considered of paramount importance, in particular, in building rapport and providing counseling, treatment, expert witnessing and expert recommendation. However, the work relationship is highly defied by various factors such as erroneous perception of each other's role contribution for the child victim justice. In Ethiopia, even though the overall limitation of cooperation of various institutions vis-à-vis the protection of the children is indicated in few studies, MDT forensic interview of sexually abused children and associated challenges has not yet been studied.

### **3.4 International Legal and Infra-legal Instruments on MDT Child Forensic Interview**

There is no comprehensive universal legal framework that entirely deals with alleged child sexual abuse and its investigation. However, there are important rules referred in various international instruments which have domestic ramifications for MDT children abuse investigation, in general, and forensic interview of sexually abused children, in particular. The need for children to be protected was acknowledged for the first time in the 1924 Declaration of the Rights of the Child. Nonetheless, it referred only to "men and women of all nations" that lack to impose obligations upon States. Likewise, the children were not yet seen as the holder of rights of their own rather as object of the protection that the Declaration meant to give (Geneva Declaration of the Rights of the Child). Afterward, the UDHR declared that childhood is entitled to special care and assistance (UDHR, Article 25). In 1959, the UN adopted Declaration of the Rights of the Child (DRC) that extend particular care to the child. Besides, the basis of best interest principles of a child is rooted in this Declaration (Omondi, 2014, p.52). Several provisions of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) of 1966 and International Covenant for Economic Social and

Cultural Rights (ICESC) of the 1966 implicitly address the rights of children (ICCPR, Article 24(1); ICESCR, Article 10(3)).

The adoption of the CRC in 1989 makes a clear statement of the rights of special treatment of children including sexual abuses of children (CRC, 1989, Article 34). The preamble of the CRC strongly states that the child, by reason of her or his physical and mental immaturity, needs special safeguards and care, including appropriate legal protection. The CRC adopts a rights-based approach to the treatment of children setting out general governing principles that should guide all types of protection, support and assistance to children. These include upholding the best interests of the child and the respect for the views and concerns of the child. The convention is legally binding human right instrument that involves full range of rights of the child. The convention, amongst others, calls for the promotion of physical and psychological recovery and social rehabilitation of children who have been sufferers of any form of abuse including sexual abused (CRC, Article 39). Moreover, the preamble of the CRC asserts families and states independently or in cooperation are responsible for caring and protecting children. This indicates to various agencies to work together in the protecting and investigation of sexually abused children.

Special treatment of child alleged of sexual abuse and its MDT investigation is also contained in various declarations and guidelines. The UN Guidelines for Action on Children in the Criminal Justice System is, for example, one of the earlier infra-legal instruments which demands measures established to handle children alleged of sexual abuse should ensure treatment with compassion and respect for their dignity (Guidelines for Action on Children in the Criminal Justice System, 1997, para. 43). The Guideline further declares that justice personnel should be given training in handling cases with child victim; states should establish specialized units to deal with offences against children including its investigation; codes of conduct and practice for proper management of cases involving child victims be developed and established (para. 44). One of the manifestations of this declaration is the units to which this study focused. And these unit as stated before encompass various agencies that involve professionals.

The Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children adopted by the UN General Assembly Resolution in 2010 is another framework intended to be a useful framework to assist countries in enhancing the protection of the children in the criminal justice system. The Guidelines provide a particular framework to assist in the review of domestic law, procedure and practice so that these



ensure full respect for the right of child victim and witness of crime and contribute to the implementation of the CRC and other international instruments on protection and wellbeing of children (Para. 44). The involvement of various agencies in the protection and wellbeing of children who are at risk are emphasized in the Guidelines. And each agency is responsible to protect the child based on the best interest of the child victim principle.

Guidelines on Justice in Matters involving Child Victims and Witnesses of Crime (2005), direct activities of national institutions in handling children. The Guidelines emphasizes many areas of importance including the child victim's right to be protected from hardship during the justice process. In this case, justice professionals are required to integrate their services under one roof and prevent secondary victimization in the process of interview. As MDT interview is conducted in accurate way, it protects both the child victim as well as the accused. The Guidelines demand professionals to periodically review and evaluate their deed in ensuring the right of the child and effective implementation of the Guidelines (Guidelines on Justice for Child Victims and Witnesses of Crime, 2005, paras. 43 and 46).

Regarding investigation of sexually abused children and interview procedure, several infra-legal instruments including the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD) Interview Protocol of 2000 has been also adopted in a number of countries and is supported by wide-ranging field researches. The NICHD interview protocol is vital for interviewing child alleged of sexual abuse (Faller, 2015). Social workers, police, public prosecutors and others pertinent professionals from various nations have been specially trained in child sensitive forensic interviewing including on how to apply the NICHD protocol for children alleged of sexual abuse (International Society for Prevention of child abuse and Neglect (ISPCAN),2011).

With respect to Africa, Declaration on the Rights and Welfare of the African Child of 1979 recognized the need to take suitable measures to promote and protect the rights and welfare of the African Child including sexually abused ones. Further, the ACRWC was adopted on 11 July 1990, which has evolved in distinct separation from the African Charter on Human and Peoples Rights. The Charter reflects the scope and popularity of the CRC and addresses issues of particular significance for the African Children. Due to this, article 16 of the ACRWC is a reflection of article 19 of the CRC. The applications of all the rights recognized in ACRWC like that of the CRC depend on the determination of who the child is. It imposes a duty on the Member State of African

Union to protect the child from all forms of inhuman treatment. The Charter regionalizes significant principles and rights stated in the CRC. For instance, in its Article 27, it adopts the definition given under CRC Article 34; Article 16 clarified the obligations of State parties to take appropriate measures and to protect children from sexual abuse including establishing special units to handle child abuse cases.

In sum, it can be concluded the above discussed legal and infra-legal instruments recognized the importance of MDT approach to investigate child abuse cases including its forensic interview.

## **4 Finding and Discussion**

### **4.1 MDT Forensic Interview with Child Alleged of Sexual Abuse and its Challenges**

#### **4.1.1 MDT Child Forensic Interview under the Ethiopian Law: Critical Gaps**

The FDRE Constitution adopted in 1995 contains a sound framework for the protection and promotion of the rights of children. The Constitution in its chapter three offers a long list of human rights and democratic rights. Everyone, including a child, is entitled to the rights entrenched in the Constitution, and such protection equally applies to children as human beings. One article is totally devoted to enlist the specific rights of children (FDRE Constitution, 1995, Article 36). The article specifically deals with rights of children including the right to free from corporal punishment, or cruel and inhuman treatment in all actions consideration shall be the best interest of the child. This constitutional rule is a step forward towards the protection and promotion of child rights. This would be valuable to promote and protect the principle of the best interests of the child in as regards to all government institutions of the country whose decisions, actions and laws are required to yield to the Constitution. The Constitution domesticates all international human right instruments including child related instruments, which the country has ratified, placed them as an integral part of the law of the land (FDRE Constitution, 1995, Article 9(4)).

Ethiopia ratified the CRC in 1991 and ACRWC in 2002. Ethiopia as a state party to the convention is primarily responsible for protecting, providing and fulfilling all human rights given to all children. For example, Article 19 (1) of the convention states that “state parties shall take appropriate legislative, administrative, social and educational” measures to protect the child from abuse. Similarly Article 34 of the CRC, the right for children not to be subjected to exploitative practices is enshrined in Article 36 of the Constitution.

The FDRE National Children's Policy of 2017 is a comprehensive policy that fully addresses children's rights and welfare. "Prevention and protection of children from social, economic and political hardships and providing rehabilitation, care and support for children in difficult circumstances" are among the most important pillars the Policy is based (pp. 1-2). The Policy addresses protection to children who are victim of crime including alleged child sexual abuse (p. 19). Four fundamental principles mentioned in the Policy relates to children at all settings, namely: children's right to live, survive and develop; best interest of the child, non-discrimination as well as child participation. One of the pillars of the Policy is prevention and protection of children from social, economic and political hardship. Section five of the policy put the roles and responsibilities of the stakeholders in respecting, protecting and promoting children's rights and welfare (pp. 28-31). The Policy states the obligation to respect, protect and promote child right and welfare relies on the collaboration and coordination of various stakeholders (p. 28). This includes government and non-government institutions where each has its own role and responsibility in respecting and protecting children in various settings (pp. 28-31). The policy has implied the importance of MDT child abuse investigation.

The FDRE Criminal Justice Policy which entered to force in March, 2011 has incorporated the right of victimized children and the establishment of special units and fundamental rights of children at all settings. Protection and assistance is required to child victims of crimes. These include special assistance in dealing with any emotional trauma and other problems due to their victimization (FDRE Criminal Justice Policy, 2011, pp.63-64).

The Revised Criminal Code of Ethiopia added different provisions to make harmony with the provision of CRC and ACRWC. Many acts of abuse against children are specifically criminalized in the new criminal law. Moreover, the criminal code also treats persons of less than 18 years of age differently both for the purpose of substantive protection and for increasing the penalties on the perpetrators of crimes against children, giving the impression that the legislature set persons of less than 18 years of age as children. Abduction, sexual violence, maltreatment, sexual exploitation and child trafficking are some of the criminal provisions concerning children (FDRE Criminal Code, Articles 620-661). Besides, the existing Criminal Procedure Code (1961) which governs the criminal justice process in Ethiopia does not provide for even a single rule pertaining to child victim of sexual abuse and its investigation. Both Codes do not contain specific provisions

that are child-sensitive mechanisms including child protection units and team members who can participate in the interview process.

In 2009, the Ethiopian Federal Supreme Court Child Project Office adopted Interview Technique Guidelines to be used by the forensic interviewers of sexually abused children. The Guideline identified the tasks of investigative interviewers in child protection units and noted that the professional shall provide services in accordance with this guideline and required to comply with the requirements in each stage process when dealing with child alleged of sexual abuse. The Guideline is the Amharic version of NICHD interview protocol and it covers all phases of the investigative interview that starts from introduction to closure phase. However, the Guideline does not mention the members of the team that could participate in the interview.

In 2010, the National Coordinator Secretariat that encompass Ministry of Justice, Education, Health, Women and Children Affairs, Social and Employee Affairs, Federal Court, Addis Ababa Police Commission, Ethiopian Women Lawyers Association, UNICEF and Religious institutions adopted Justice and Protection Center Guideline (Justice and Protection Center Guideline, 2010, p. 1). Though the Guideline emphasizes on the health professionals working in the Center, it also guides the coordinator of the Center, case manager, health professionals (nurse and doctor), investigative police, public prosecutor and psychologist in the protection and investigation of child sexual abuse cases. The Guideline strongly urges coordinated response of child victim of sexual abuse with in the centers and beyond (p. 3). The responsibilities and the procedure to be followed by each professional are stipulated in the Guideline. However, the Guideline is not comprehensive as it ignores the role of other professionals such as social workers. Moreover, it does not have legal effect whenever it is violated.

In fine, though different efforts have been done to govern issues of children in different situations, MDT interview of sexually abused children is slightly addressed by the existing policy and legal frameworks of Ethiopia. The role and contribution of professionals other than the police and public prosecutor in interviewing sexually abused children is virtually overlooked.

#### **4.1.2 MDT Child Forensic Interview Practice and Its Challenges in the Selected Units**

The study revealed that forensic interview of sexually abused children is conducted in some way through the MDT approach where the investigative police, public prosecutors, health professionals

and sometime social workers participate in the interview process. In particular, this is true with regard to the Gandhi Unit. Most of the study participants believe that MDT is an important approach in which many professionals with diverse expertise participate in the interview process. When asked about the need of MDT forensic interview of sexually abused children, one respondent succinctly replied that:

When forensic interview is conducted in a team, the strength of different expertise and point of view that the professionals possess is important to deliver better and comprehensive service for the child victim of sexual abuse. Besides, up on the accusation of child sexual abuse, the possibility of the child to get confused from the responding criminal justice system such as the police is common. Multiple interviews by many professionals including interviews by untrained police create problems for the child.

MDT forensic interview in the participants' view is coordinated response to child abuse cases that reduces replication of interview, secondary victimization and stress on the child victim of sexual abuse. Besides, they stated that MDT Forensic interview enables better information sharing and installs further intervention service for the child victim. This is in line with the studies by (Bracewell, 2015) which argued that MDT forensic interview enables well-coordinated sexual abuse investigations that benefit from various experts. It in particular helps to share information about the abuse and the child, and minimizes replication of interview by many interviewers.

According to the finding, whenever there is a need, the health professionals provide medical treatment to the child alleged of sexual abuse. The police initiate child sexual abuse investigation, collect preliminary information about the sexual abuse, conduct the interview, and document statements from the child. When the investigation is completed, the police transfer the file to prosecutor for prosecution and prepare for the court based on the evidence. Likewise, the prosecutor collects legally relevant preliminary information about the sexual abuse, determine its legality and the criteria and process to conduct interview, conduct interview with the child victim, ask different general and legal defensible questions, institute child sexual abuse criminal charges, testify in court his/her evidence about the sexual abuse based on the result, and participate in the decision of referral services. Believing that the role of the police and prosecutors are mainly based on the general rules of the Ethiopian 1961 Criminal Procedure Code of 1961 and other pertinent laws, forensic interview of sexually abused children is considered as a primary duty of the police and prosecutors. Subsequently, some of the participants (police and prosecutors) believe that the police and prosecutors are the core components of criminal justice system that have decisive role

in the forensic interview. In their view, social workers in the MDT forensic interview are meant to facilitate the interview process mainly by smoothing the relationship between the interviewers and the child alleged of sexual abuse. One respondent who is social worker said that "problems exist between the police and public prosecutors on understanding social workers role, on the competence and even on the relevance of the social work profession on child sexual abuse investigations." Another respondent further adds:

In my experience with social workers, they are in the unit to support the police and public prosecutor. They can't participate in the case by their own but they participate whenever the police or prosecutor invites them to do so. Thus, I don't think that the role of social workers in interview process is equally important like the police and prosecutor.

In contrast, the studies by (Smith, 2014; Kisthardt, 2005) indicated that each professional who participate in the interview are equally important in providing better service for the child victim of sexual abuse. Successful child sexual abuse investigation including its interview hinges on the contribution of each members of the team. Likewise, social workers within the South African Police Service play a crucial role because courts in the South African context rely on the social workers' expert witness and recommendation on the subject of the sexual abuse (Smith, 2014; Jonkers, 2012). The studies by Jonkers and Smith pointed out forensic social workers, also known as criminal justice social workers, in the interview of sexually abused children have a number of roles they should perform. This includes conduct interview, counsel, provide expert testimony, prepare social work reports and educate other professional on human and child developments. Forensic social workers in the South African context have considerable roles both in the child sexual abuse investigation and in the courts (Smith, 2014; Jonkers, 2012).

The study also revealed major challenges that hinder coordinated treatment of sexually abused children. One of the major challenges of MDT forensic interview is duplication of interview. One respondent described the situation as:

The composition of police, prosecutors and social workers in forensic interview is meant to reduce the number of interviews to which a child is subjected including reducing unfamiliar interviewers to whom a child must narrate and provide a trained interviewer. Though the three professionals often conduct interview altogether, other sub city's unit again subject the child to duplicative interview believing that the former was not sufficient. The child alleged of sexual abuse come to Gandhi for medical assessments and initial interview. After medical treatment, we conduct the interview and gather evidence about the abuse and transfer to the concerned sub city's police unit. After they receive the initial investigation file they conduct interview again.

Similarly, another respondent stated that though the setup of units was meant to have well-coordinated, divergent perspectives and unique expertise that each team member brings to the group as a whole, the practice is otherwise. Congruently, one respondent stated:

Child sexual abuse perpetrators can only be successfully brought to justice and protect the rights of the child victim when there is good coordination among different professionals including police, social workers, public prosecutors, health professionals and so on. However, in the unit I work with there is no as such good coordination among us. One is highly concerned on the process of forensic interview process while the other is not. Even you can't see as such smooth relationship among us. The police collect relevant evidences after passing challenging state of affairs, the public prosecutor on the other hand rejects saying that it is not relevant. Social workers are also not influential in the interview process. Much work is needed to overcome these limitations.

In relation to this, the study participants reported that in a MDT, members need to understand what other members are doing and how their activities interrelate. In support of this, another respondent stated:

The police should consider how the interview might traumatize a child victim. Social workers need to understand that their treatment and evaluation techniques might affect the police interview process. Although differences in opinion are expected, effective team work relies on a mutually agreed upon and open mechanism for discussing and resolving differences. But the practice is to the reverse. This holds back to deliver enhanced and coordinated service to the child victim of sexual abuse.

As stated above, the respondents reported that lack of coordination is one of the main challenges in MDT forensic interview of sexually abused children. Similarly, (Pangborn, 2009) argued that in a MDT forensic interview there are barriers that either emanate from institutions or from the professionals themselves. The different philosophies, organizational structures, funding limitations, conditions of service may be regarded as institutional barriers, whereas professional barriers include work-style differences, communication gaps, absence of respect amongst themselves, sexual involvements with team members, conflicts over power, and mistrust and lack of knowledge of the legal process on the side of social workers (Han et al., 2008).

## **5 Conclusion and the Ways Forward**

The study addressed multidisciplinary forensic interview of child alleged of sexual abuse and associated challenges in light of the Ethiopian law and its practice in the selected units. The finding has unveiled that forensic interview of sexually abused children is not fully conducted in a MDT way. This is in particular true with regard to the Arada and Yeka Units. The major challenges

encompass wrong perception about each other's contribution towards child victim justice including forensic interview, duplication of interview, lack of clarity about each other's roles and lack of cooperation among the professionals, and absence of law that regulate each agency or professional involved in the interview process. Besides, the forensic interview process is dominated by the investigative police and public prosecutors. Social workers except in the Gandhi unit are virtually none.

Ethiopia is a signatory to various international human rights and child specific instruments, which bind it legally and morally. Hence, the country is under an international obligation to reform its laws to bring them in line with the international treaty obligations such as the CRC and the ACRWC and to take measures, including legislative and administrative, to put in place child victim sensitive justice process including forensic interview of sexually abused children.

Based on the above findings, the author has suggested the following issues that should be given due consideration by the concerned agency:

- Forensic interview of sexually abused children is expected to be conducted using MDT approach where the police, social workers, prosecutors, health professionals and other professionals are directly involved in the interview process. Except at the Gandhi unit however, there is almost no social workers in the two units. The responsible institution including the police commission has to therefore recruit more social workers and these social workers need to be permanently stationed in the units to work closely with other members of the team.
- The finding unveiled that the role of the police and prosecutors is considered as decisive while the role of social workers is less recognized and considered as supportive one. However, social work intervention is necessary in criminal justice system in particular in the child sexual investigations. Forensic social work as subspecialty of social work is the relevant expertise that can be fully applied in interviewing sexually abused children in the selected units. Hence, there has to be a communication mechanism between the professionals and joint trainings on the contribution of each professional to the child victim justice, in general, and forensic interview, in particular.



- There is also potential conflict between evidentiary and therapeutic goals in the team forensic interview practice. An important facet of building this relationship is therefore the enactment of robust law that wholly treats child alleged of sexual abuse and its investigation along with a stick enforcing mechanism. Along with this, the development of guidelines that spell out how each agency and practitioners will respond to child sexual abuse investigations including its forensic interview. Hence, the FDRE Attorney General, Addis Ababa Police Commission and pertinent agencies should design guidelines that show the role, responsibilities and overall interaction of each agency and professional in the forensic interview process.
- Teaching social work students about their roles and responsibilities will help the social workers to be effective in the child victim of sexual abuse investigations and help to provide better service for the best interest of the child. Social workers have to be cognizant about the roles of forensic social workers in the criminal justice system more specifically in the forensic interview of sexually abused children. The universities that offer social work programs should at least provide basic legal knowledge for students since social work practice in child sexual abuse investigation is one stream which social workers will provide service since a social work profession graduate cannot be forensic social worker or interviewer without initial and on job trainings.
- The police training and educational institutions such as the Ethiopian Police University College, regional police colleges and training centers should also incorporate child sexual abuse investigation course into the curriculum of their education programs to enable the police investigative officers capable of conducting forensic interview of sexually abused children. In particular the inclusion of contents such as child development issues, the implementation of interviews, and roles and responsibilities of police in the MDT interview of sexually abused children in the child protection and investigation units would be necessary.

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