

# **Goal Setting Skill as a Pernacea to Sexual Abuse: A Theoretical Review**

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## **Abstract**

*Sexual abuse has consistently raised significant concerns among stakeholders in the education sector, particularly within Nigerian secondary schools, thereby necessitating this research. This study aimed to assess the relative effectiveness of goal-setting skills as a strategy for mitigating sexual abuse. While sex is a natural activity that can provide meaningful and intimate experiences, it can also become an antisocial act when engaged in under inappropriate circumstances. From a psychological perspective, sexual behavior is deemed maladaptive if it leads to feelings of distress, anxiety, or guilt, or if it inflicts harm on others. In essence, a sexual behaviour is considered maladaptive if it adversely affects an individual's well-being or that of others. Goal setting entails the formulation of an action plan aimed at directing an individual or group towards a specific objective. Goals can be established at various levels: initially, individuals outline their overarching aspirations for their lives and the significant objectives they wish to accomplish. Subsequently, the study disaggregates these aspirations into progressively smaller targets that must be achieved to realise their long-term goals.*

**Keywords:** Sexuality; Goal Setting; Sexual Abuse; Behaviour

## **Introduction**

Sexual abuse remains a pervasive issue that has deeply infiltrated society and the nation as a whole. This alarming situation has raised

significant concerns among Nigerian parents and guardians, particularly as numerous cases have been reported recently throughout the country (Nextier, 2020). There is an increasing awareness regarding the extent and nature of this problem, prompting substantial efforts to combat all forms of violence against children. Notable advancements include international consensus on objectives aimed at eradicating violence against children by 2030, as outlined in the Sustainable Development Goals; the creation of an inter-agency framework comprising seven evidence-based prevention strategies known as INSPIRE; and the formation of the Global Partnership to End Violence against Children. In response to the escalating misuse of information and communication technologies for the sexual exploitation of children, the We PROTECT Global Alliance has been established, providing countries with guidance through its Model National Response. Furthermore, initiatives aimed at eliminating violence against women and children are increasingly interconnected and mutually supportive, as articulated in the RESPECT framework.

Goals are more intentional than mere wishes or fleeting intentions. Thus, the act of setting goals signifies a commitment of thought, emotion, and behavior towards achieving those objectives. In this process, the individual delineates a desired future state that contrasts with their current situation, thereby creating a discrepancy that motivates subsequent actions. Goal setting can be informed by specific criteria, such as the SMART framework. Research conducted by Edwin A. Locke and his associates, particularly Gary Latham, has demonstrated that more precise and challenging goals yield greater performance enhancements compared to simpler or more generalized objectives. Goals should be specific, time-bound, and ambitious, as vague objectives can diminish the effectiveness of limited attention resources. Unreasonably short time limitations make the aim harder than it has to be, and disproportionately long time constraints are discouraging. If motivation rather than skill is the barrier to achieving a difficult goal, it is best to put it at the 90th percentile of performance.

objective difficulty and task performance have a positive linear connection as long as the individual accepts the objective, is capable of achieving it, and does not have conflicting goals.

### **Sexual Abuse**

According to the American Psychological Association (2020), sexual abuse is defined as any non-consensual sexual act, wherein offenders may employ force, threats, or exploit individuals who are unable to provide consent. This form of abuse is often linked to feelings of shock, fear, or disbelief, and can lead to enduring psychological effects such as anxiety, fear, and post-traumatic stress disorder, among others. Isiaka (2020) highlighted that the increasing incidents of rape and sexual abuse, particularly among minors in Nigeria, have prompted the declaration of a state of emergency regarding these issues, alongside calls for the implementation of the Violence against Persons Prohibition Act (VAPP) 2015. The experience of sexual abuse is inherently traumatic, resulting in significant physical, social, and psychological distress for the victim (Caffo & Belaise, 2003). Adolescent girls are reported to be at a heightened risk of sexual abuse; UNICEF (2015) indicated that one in four girls and one in ten boys in Nigeria have encountered sexual violence prior to reaching 18 years of age. Numerous studies conducted in Nigeria have yielded diverse findings regarding the prevalence of rape and sexual abuse (Bugaje, Ogunrinde, & Faruk, 2012; Akinlusi et al., 2014; Manyike et al., 2015; Ezechi et al., 2016; Hassan et al., 2016), although the methodologies employed in these studies vary considerably. Most of these investigations reported a higher prevalence among females (95%) compared to males, with many perpetrators being known to the victims (WHO, 2006; Bugaje et al., 2012; Ezechi et al., 2016; Hassan et al., 2016).

The psychological and medical repercussions of sexual abuse can persist long after the initial trauma, often placing adolescents at an increased risk for further victimization. A significant issue regarding the prevalence of rape in contemporary society is the reluctance of victims

to report such incidents to law enforcement agencies (World Health Organization, 2003), despite a notable rise in reported cases and advocacy for victims to come forward. A study conducted by Odeyemi, Olufunlayo, Ogunnowo, and Onajole (2016) on sexual violence among out-of-school female adolescents in Lagos, Nigeria, revealed that merely 22.9% of rape victims chose to report their experiences to the police. With the overwhelming majority of cases remaining unreported, and those that are reported often not being prosecuted in a timely manner, the deterrent effect on potential offenders is significantly diminished. According to DaSilva-Ibru (2019), the rates of prosecution and conviction for sexual offenders remain alarmingly low, despite the widespread occurrence of rape and sexual violence and the existence of relevant laws. Furthermore, reliable data to substantiate the reported 18 convictions in one publication is not readily accessible (DaSilva-Ibru, 2019). Although various human rights organisations have initiated awareness campaigns throughout the country, several persistent factors continue to hinder the reporting of such cases. Feelings of shame experienced by victims, along with the desire to protect the identity of the perpetrator particularly when the offender is a family member are significant contributors to the underreporting and low conviction rates observed in the nation today.

Sexual abuse constitutes a violation of an individual's dignity and sexual rights, and it is subject to legal penalties. According to DaSilva-Ibru (2019), this offense is classified as a crime, and a conviction may result in a life sentence. Every person possesses the inherent right and autonomy to make informed choices regarding sexual matters, as well as the obligation to honor the same rights and dignity of others. It is imperative for all members of society to safeguard the rights, safety, and welfare of children who are vulnerable to rape and sexual assault. Consequently, adolescents and survivors of sexual abuse are urged to recognise their rights as citizens and to feel assured that justice will be served, ensuring that offenders are held accountable for their actions. This study aims to examine research conducted in Nigeria to identify

gaps in existing scholarly literature, with the goal of providing appropriate solutions and recommendations to effectively address and mitigate the prevalence of this issue in our country.

### **Prevalence of Sexual Abuse in Nigeria**

Sexual abuse represents a significant issue within Nigerian society. A review by Eyong and Emechebe (2019) indicates that the prevalence of sexual abuse among adolescents varies widely, ranging from 6% to 74%. This disparity in prevalence rates can be attributed to factors such as geographical location, sample size, and the scope of the studies conducted. In a cross-sectional study by Ogunfowokan and Fajemilehin (2015), which examined experiences of sexual harassment, sexual exploitation, and rape among adolescent girls in the Ife/Ijesa Zone of Osun State, it was found that 30 adolescents (15.1%) reported experiencing child sexual abuse (mean =  $1.2 \pm 0.4$ ), while 59 (29.6%) reported experiencing sexual abuse during their adolescence (mean =  $1.3 \pm 0.5$ ). Additionally, the study revealed that 56 adolescents (55.5%) experienced sexual harassment, and 21 (20.8%) reported incidents of rape. In a separate cross-sectional study conducted by Balogun and Adenowuro (2020) in Ibadan, the prevalence of child sexual abuse among secondary school students was reported at 29.0%. The most frequently reported forms of abuse included non-contact sexual abuse, which involved exposure to explicit content, while contact sexual abuse, characterised by touching or fondling of genitals, was the most common. Akinlusi et al. (2014) conducted a five-year retrospective study on cases of sexual assault at LASUTH from January 2008 to December 2012, revealing a concerning 83.6% of sexual abuse cases involved girls under the age of 19. The findings of Akinlusi et al. (2014) align with those of other studies (Daru et al., 2011; Adeleke et al., 2012; Akhiwu et al., 2013), which similarly indicated a high incidence of sexual assaults among children and adolescents. 1. Manyike, Chinawa, Aniwada, and Chinawa (2015) conducted a cross-sectional study examining child sexual abuse among adolescents in southeastern Nigeria, revealing an overall prevalence rate of 40% for sexual abuse in

this demographic. The incidence of penetrative abuse was notably low at 7.5%, while forced abuse was reported at a significantly higher rate of 46.2%. In a separate community-based study by David, Ezechi, Wapmuk, Gbajabiamila, Ohihoin, Herbertson, and Odeyemi (2018), a lower prevalence of child sexual abuse, at 25.7%, was found among adolescents in Southwestern Nigeria. Additionally, a cross-sectional study by Okagua and Alex-Hart (2020) involving 1,162 secondary school students in Port Harcourt indicated that 422 students, or 38.9%, had experienced one or more forms of sexual assault. The collective findings from these studies underscore the prevalence of sexual abuse among adolescents in Nigeria. This alarming trend has prompted increased protests and awareness campaigns nationwide (Aljazeera, 2020). Although reports of sexual abuse to law enforcement for the prosecution of offenders have historically been infrequent (Akinlusi, Rabiu, Olawepo, Adewunmi, Ottun, & Akinola, 2014; David et al., 2015), there has been a notable rise in such reports recently (Folayan, Odetoyinbo, Harrison, & Brown, 2014; Premium Times, 2020).

Factors contributing to sexual abuse include poverty (Oshima, Jonson-Reid, & Seay, 2014), ignorance (Ohayi, Ezugwu, Chigbu, Arinze-Onyia, & Iyoke, 2015), and substance use (Olaleye & Ajuwon, 2012), among others. Furthermore, Ogunfowokan et al. (2015) identified a significant correlation between child sexual abuse and subsequent abuse during adolescence, indicating that children who experience sexual abuse are at a higher risk of being victimised as they grow older.

### **Perpetrators of Sexual Abuse**

Daily, there is an increasing concern regarding the urgent need to address the issue of sexual abuse within the country. Academic research has focused on identifying the individuals responsible for this troubling phenomenon, yielding findings aimed at recognizing these offenders in the hope of formulating a sustainable solution. Several Nigerian scholars have delved into this subject, and this study has reviewed their contributions. According to Okagua et al. (2020), among the reported

perpetrators of sexual abuse, 153 (33.8%) were caregivers or family members, while 123 (27.2%) were neighbours. This aligns with the findings of David et al. (2015), which similarly indicated that family members and relatives are the primary offenders in cases of child sexual abuse. Conversely, Manyike et al. (2015) noted that the majority of sexual abuse perpetrators were boyfriends (31.2%) and neighbours (16.1%). Supporting this, Ogunfowokan et al. (2015) found that male friends and sexual partners are significant perpetrators of sexual abuse among adolescents. Various factors contribute to these outcomes. Kunnuji and Esiet (2015) identified predictors of statutory rape experiences, including age, basic deprivation, and living arrangements, among others.

Balogun and Adenowuro (2020) reported that approximately 54.1% of sexual abuse victims were assaulted in the perpetrator's residence. They also highlighted that the most common offenders of non-contact sexual abuse were friends (55.5%), neighbors (22.7%), and family members (20.9%), while the primary perpetrators of contact sexual abuse were friends (47.3%), neighbors (25.7%), and strangers (12.2%). Thus, it can be concluded that sexual abuse perpetrators are often individuals who are close to the victims, such as friends, neighbors, and relatives. This reality places a significant responsibility on parents and guardians to vigilantly monitor their children to prevent potential abuse. Most of the researches reviewed were cross-sectional studies only one retrospective study which covered duration of five-years was revised. With the growing increase in reported cases across the nation, sexual abuse victims are becoming more confident to report cases to law enforcement agencies to seek justice.

Qualitative researches addressing sexual abuse among adolescents are few, there is need to carry out more qualitative studies so as to look into other areas such as the determinants (socio and cultural) which predisposes adolescents to sexual abuse and rape. Intervention studies also need to be carried out; so as to develop and experiment new

strategies and approaches that would help to bring about a lasting solution to the menace. Studies that look into the laws and government policies regarding sexual abuse and rape should be encouraged among researchers as none of the reviewed studies addressed it.

The victim's human rights are violated when they are sexually abused; nevertheless, researchers did not examine people's understanding of this fact. Despite the physical and psychological damage that sexual abuse victims experience, the majority of the examined studies did not discuss therapeutic approaches or offer recommendations for helping victims of sexual abuse.

### **Goal Setting**

The process of establishing precise, quantifiable, realistic, pertinent, and time-bound goals that a person or organization wants to accomplish is known as goal setting. It entails determining the intended results and creating a strategy to get there. A framework for action and guidance is provided by goals. They aid in determining what must be done, when, and why. Setting goals helps people concentrate their efforts, remain on course, and track their progress. It also acts as a motivating tool. It can support greater accountability and guarantee the effective and efficient use of resources.

### **Personal Goal Setting**

Setting goals is an effective way to arrange your own life. The goal-setting process aids in determining your life's direction. Knowing exactly what you want to accomplish helps you focus your efforts in the right places. Additionally, you'll recognize the distractions that would ordinarily entice you to go off track with ease. Furthermore, well-defined objectives may be very inspiring, and as you develop the practice of creating and accomplishing goals, you'll notice that your confidence grows quickly.



### **Getting More Goals with Concentration**

High performers in all disciplines, including successful businesspeople and athletes, adopt goal-setting approaches. They instill in you both immediate and long-term motivation. They assist you make the most of your life by helping you to arrange your time and resources and by concentrating your knowledge gain. You can monitor your progress and feel proud of yourself when you reach your goals if you set clear, precise objectives. What could have previously appeared like a long, meaningless grind is now progressing forward. As you realise you are capable of reaching your goals, making goals will also help you become more confident in yourself.

### **Goal setting skills and Sexual Abuse**

Goals play a pivotal role in various theories concerning health behavior change, suggesting that individuals are more likely to adopt and maintain new health behaviors when these align with their personal goals and priorities. According to social cognitive theory, goals are intricately connected to self-motivation, influencing individuals' engagement in specific behaviors based on their aspirations. A multitude of studies indicates a positive correlation between the pursuit and achievement of personal goals and overall health and well-being. In the context of close romantic relationships, individuals often take their partners into account when establishing goals, rather than solely focusing on personal ambitions. Theories from social psychology and relationship science suggest that goal coordination with a romantic partner occurs in relation to both significant life objectives and everyday tasks. Interdependence theory differentiates between self-oriented and relationship-oriented goals to better understand relationship dynamics.

This theory asserts that individuals in committed partnerships may adjust their motivations, leading to a greater emphasis on "relationship-focused" goals, which tend to yield more favorable outcomes for both partners and the relationship as a whole. In the realm of primary prevention, societies adopt two main strategies to tackle the underlying

causes of sexual violence and to alter the culture of perpetration: modifying social norms (i.e., prevalent behaviours) and enhancing skills for effective prevention initiatives. The National Sexual Violence Resource Center outlines five norms that illustrate how collective attitudes, behaviors, and beliefs can foster an environment conducive to sexual violence.

**The five identified norms are:**

1. Women: the constrained roles assigned to women, leading to their objectification and oppression.
2. Power: the importance placed on acquiring and sustaining power, often manifested as dominance over others.
3. Violence: the acceptance of aggressive behavior and the tendency to hold victims accountable for their victimization.
4. Masculinity: traditional definitions of masculinity that prioritize domination, control, and risk-taking.
5. Privacy: ideas surrounding individual and family privacy that encourage secrecy and silence.

By empowering communities to challenge these norms and develop competencies to address the risk factors for sexual violence, we will facilitate a cultural shift and create sustainable change for safer and healthier societies.

**Conclusion**

Sexual abuse is a significant issue among adolescents, with a higher incidence reported among adolescent girls compared to boys. Furthermore, the individuals who perpetrate such abuse are often familiar to the victims. Goal setting entails creating a structured action plan aimed at motivating and directing an individual or group towards achieving a specific objective. Unlike mere desires or fleeting intentions, goals are intentional and well-defined. Consequently, the process of setting goals indicates a commitment of thought, emotion, and behaviour towards reaching that objective. This commitment establishes a vision of a desired future state that contrasts with the

current situation, thereby creating a discrepancy that encourages subsequent actions.

### **Recommendations**

1. This study suggests that effective goal setting can play a role in preventing sexual abuse.
2. It is imperative for parents and guardians to closely monitor their children and ensure that they are under the care of trustworthy individuals with reputable character to safeguard them from potential abuse.

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