



Suffering Whether You Tell or Don't Tell

Perceived revictimization of child sexual abuse
survivors in the school setting in Zimbabwe

Chris Obong'o, Meagan Cain,
Zwashe Bangani, Kim Miller
Sexual Violence Research Initiative Forum
24 October, 2019

INTRODUCTION



- Zimbabwe: one-third (33%) of young women aged 18–24 years reported having experienced at least one form of sexual abuse by age 18 (ZIMSTAT, 2013)
- Child sexual abuse is associated with negative health outcomes and risk behaviors (Barth et al., 2013; Andersson et al., 2012; Bornovalova, Gwadz, Kahler, Aklin, & Lejuez, 2008; Magadi, 2011; Richter, Makusha, Komárek, Daniels, & Coates, 2015; UNICEF, 2013, 2016, 2011, 2012; WHO, 2003)
 - Anxiety, depression, suicidal thoughts
 - Early sexual debut
 - Multiple sex partners
 - Substance abuse
 - Experiencing or perpetrating sexual violence

PURPOSE

- Disclosing child sexual abuse is an important step towards receiving care
- In Zimbabwe, 48.2% adolescent girls and young women and 55% of adolescent boys and young men who experienced sexual abuse before age 18 years did not tell someone about the abuse (ZIMSTAT, 2013)
- **Our question: what are the perceived barriers to disclosing child sexual abuse, especially abuse by teachers, according to children and parents? How can we conceptualize this?**

METHODS

- 8 focus groups discussions conducted with parents and children participating in a parenting intervention in Chitungwiza, Zimbabwe
 - Children aged 10-14 years
 - No requirement of previous sexual abuse
- Child friendly techniques for discussing difficult topics
 - Presented scenarios and asked the children follow-up probes
- Qualitative analysis that focused on identifying perceived barriers to disclosing child sexual abuse

RESULTS: Participants

- Forty children and forty parents participated in the focus group discussions (n=80)
- Children
 - Half (50%) of children were boys
 - Median age 12 years
- Parents
 - 78% women
 - 20–62 years old

Four Themes

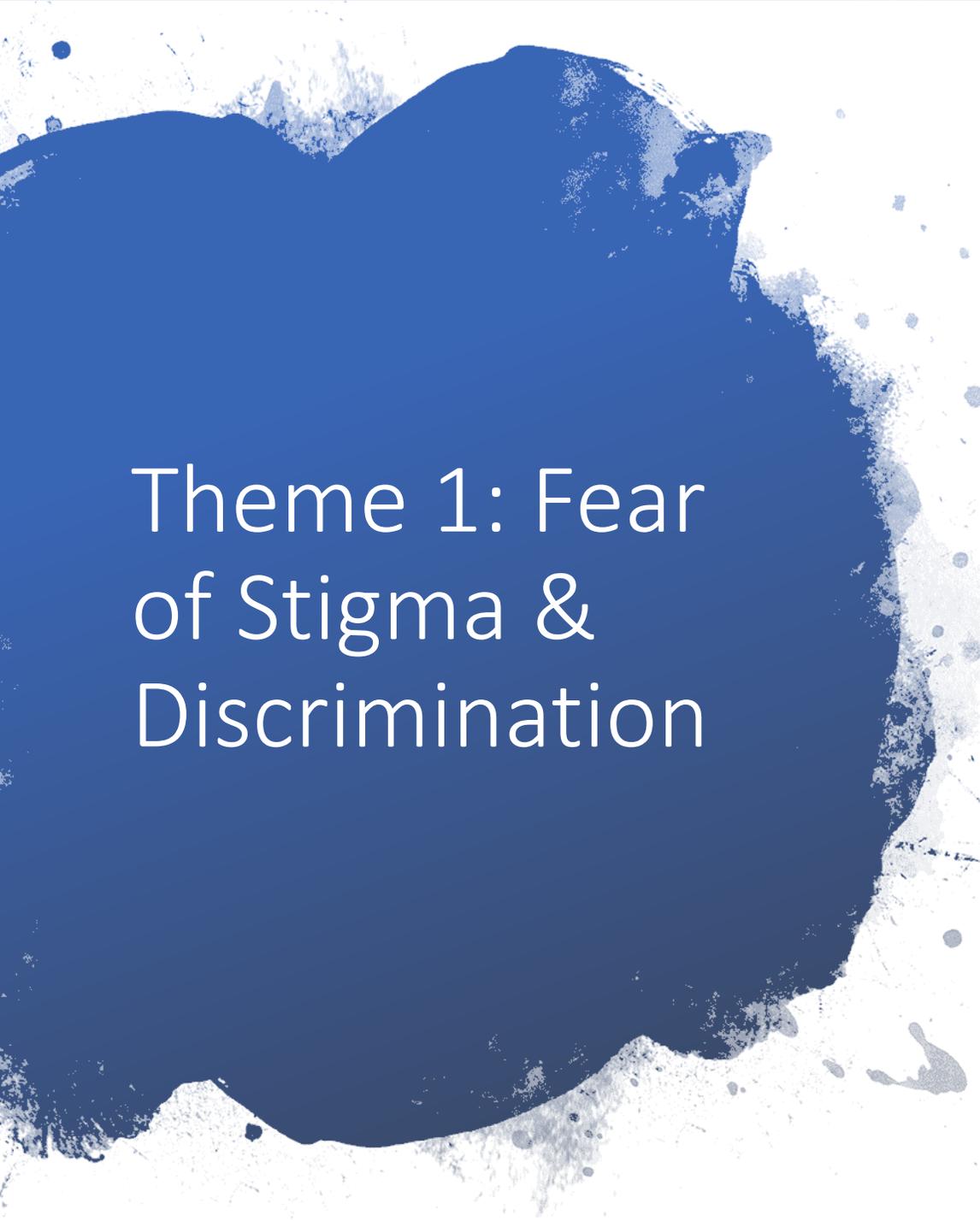


Stigma & discrimination

Being doubted, called a liar

Being blamed

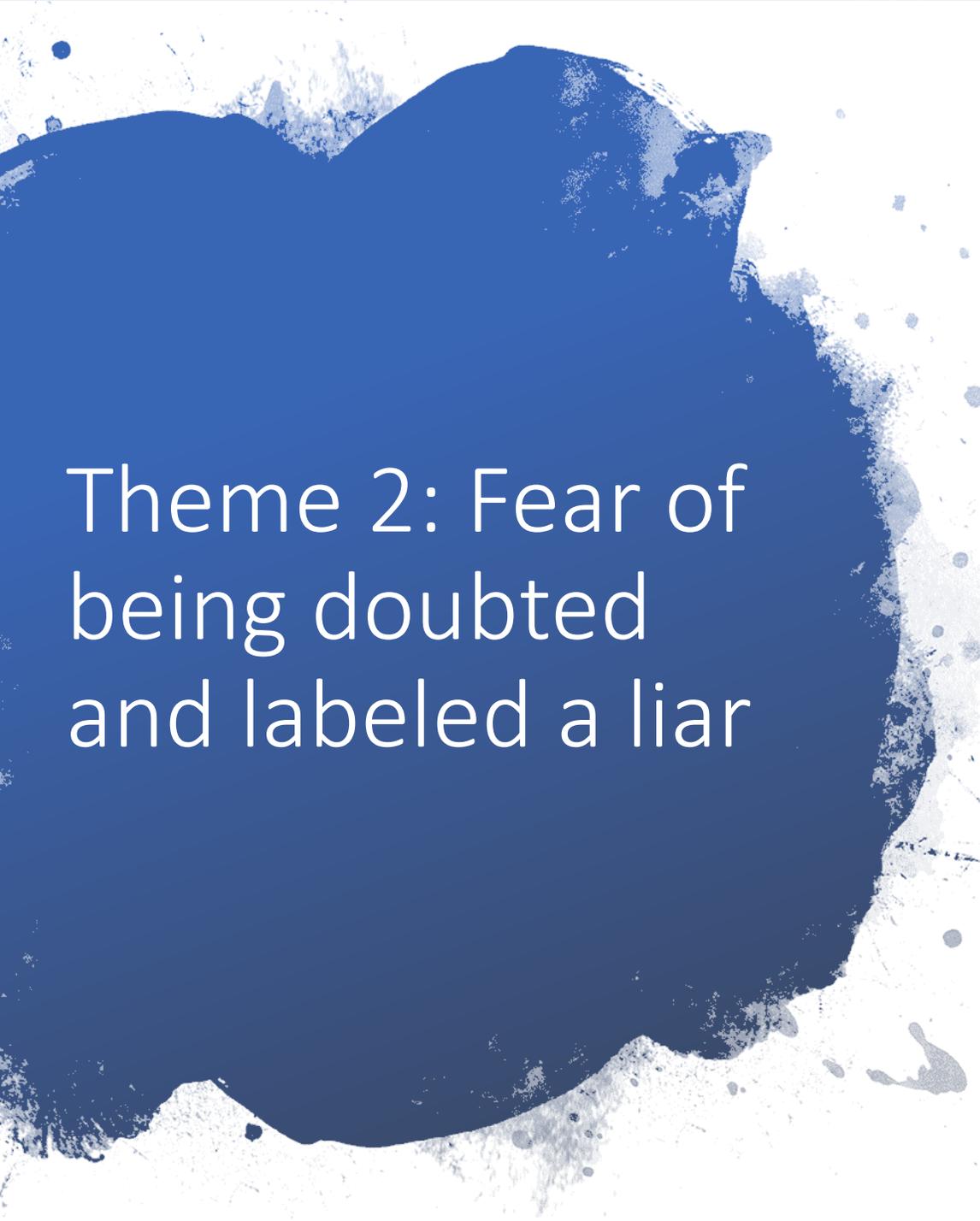
Retaliation



Theme 1: Fear of Stigma & Discrimination

“If it was me, it would be hard [to disclose] because everyone at school will mock me saying that I am now just an empty tin [no longer a virgin].” - child

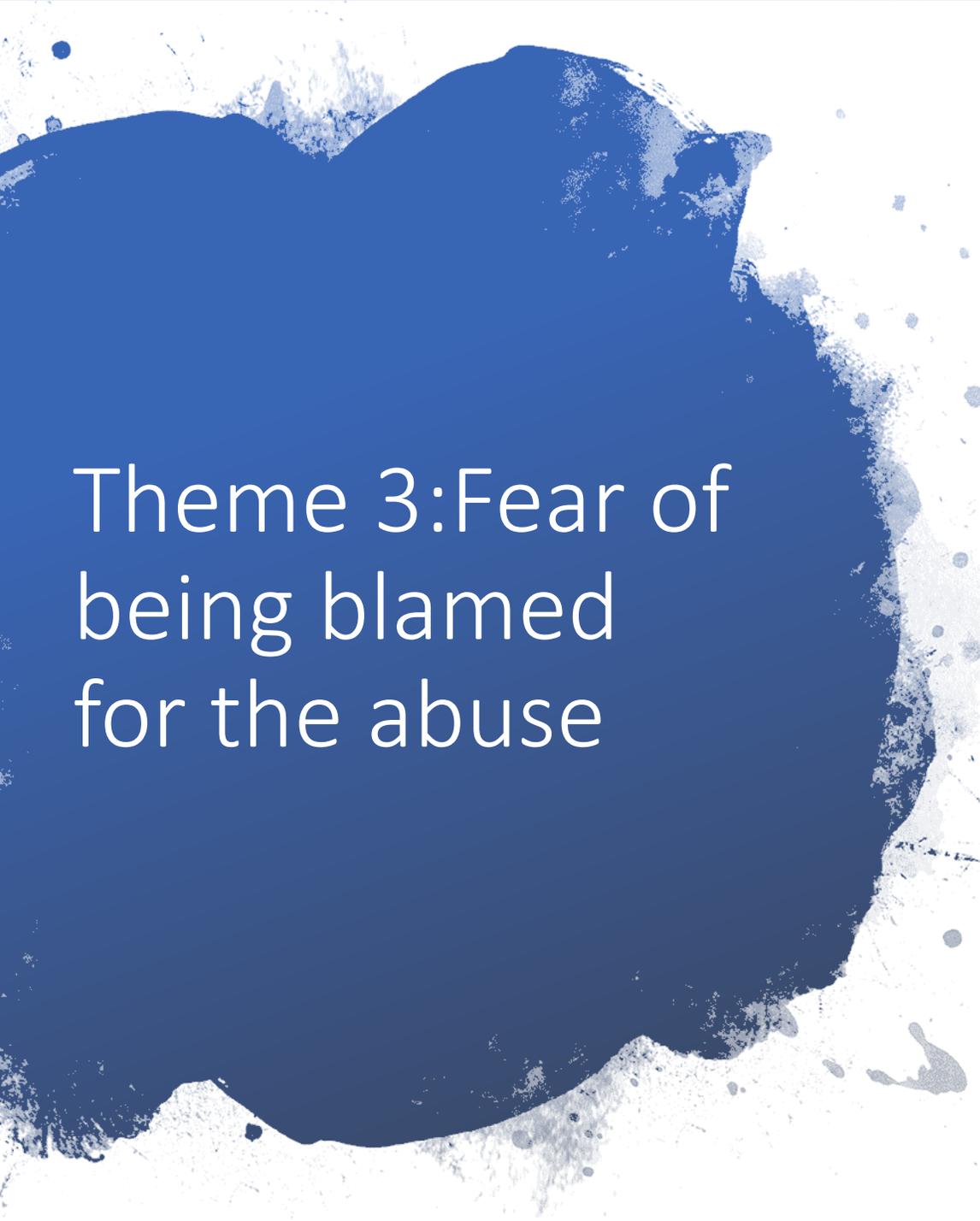
“The child might not get any friends at school and it will affect her learning. She will feel out of place.” - parent



Theme 2: Fear of
being doubted
and labeled a liar

*“It will be hard [to disclose]
because they will question if it is
possible for a teacher to sexually
abuse you.” - child*

*“Children lie about these things.”
- parent*

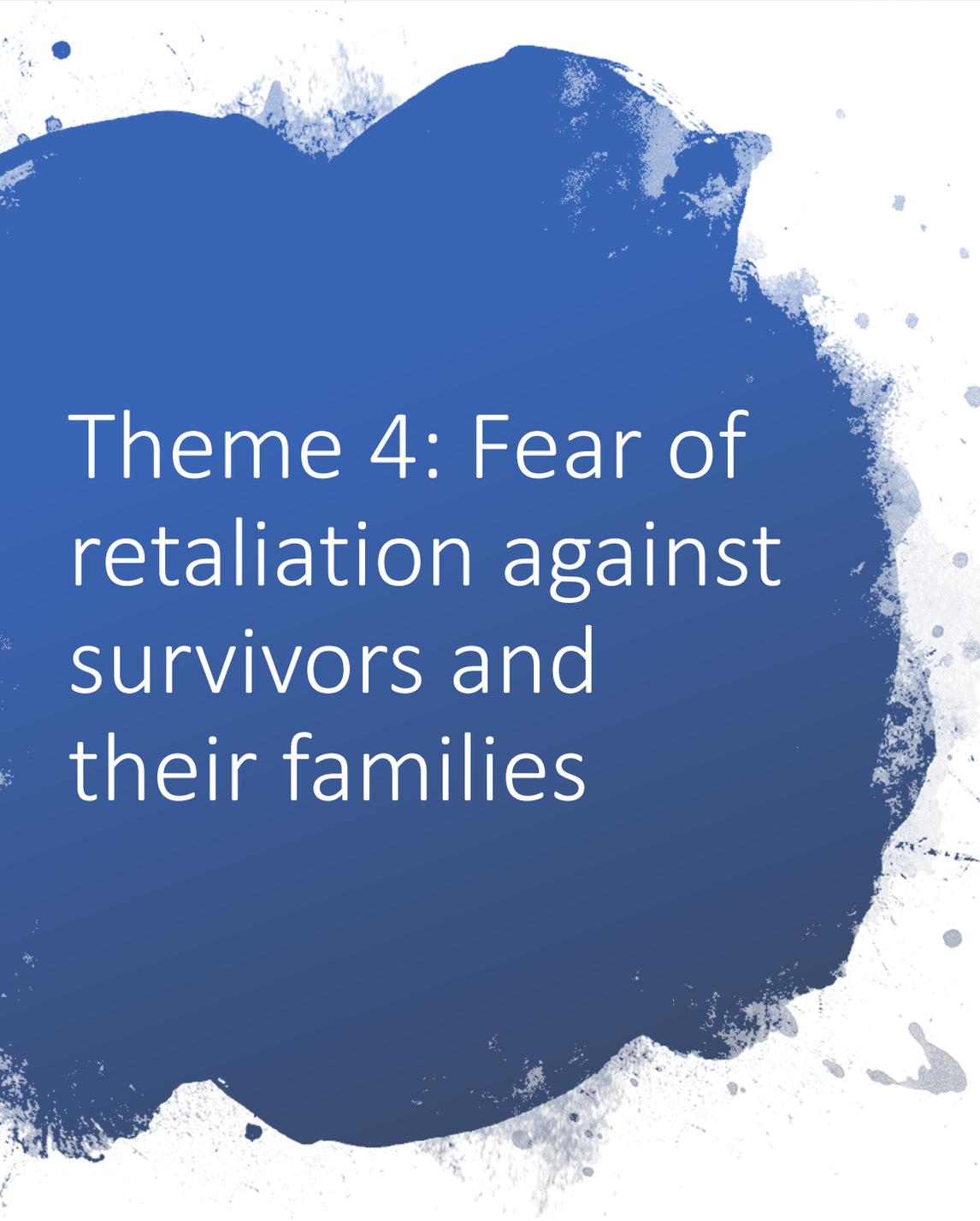


Theme 3: Fear of being blamed for the abuse

“There are some parents whom when told cannot accept reality, they will ask you why you agreed and tell you that you should have come home.”

- child

“It will be difficult [to report] because they will be saying that you are the one that did not train your child, so you are the one with a problem and that is why those things happened to the child.” - parent

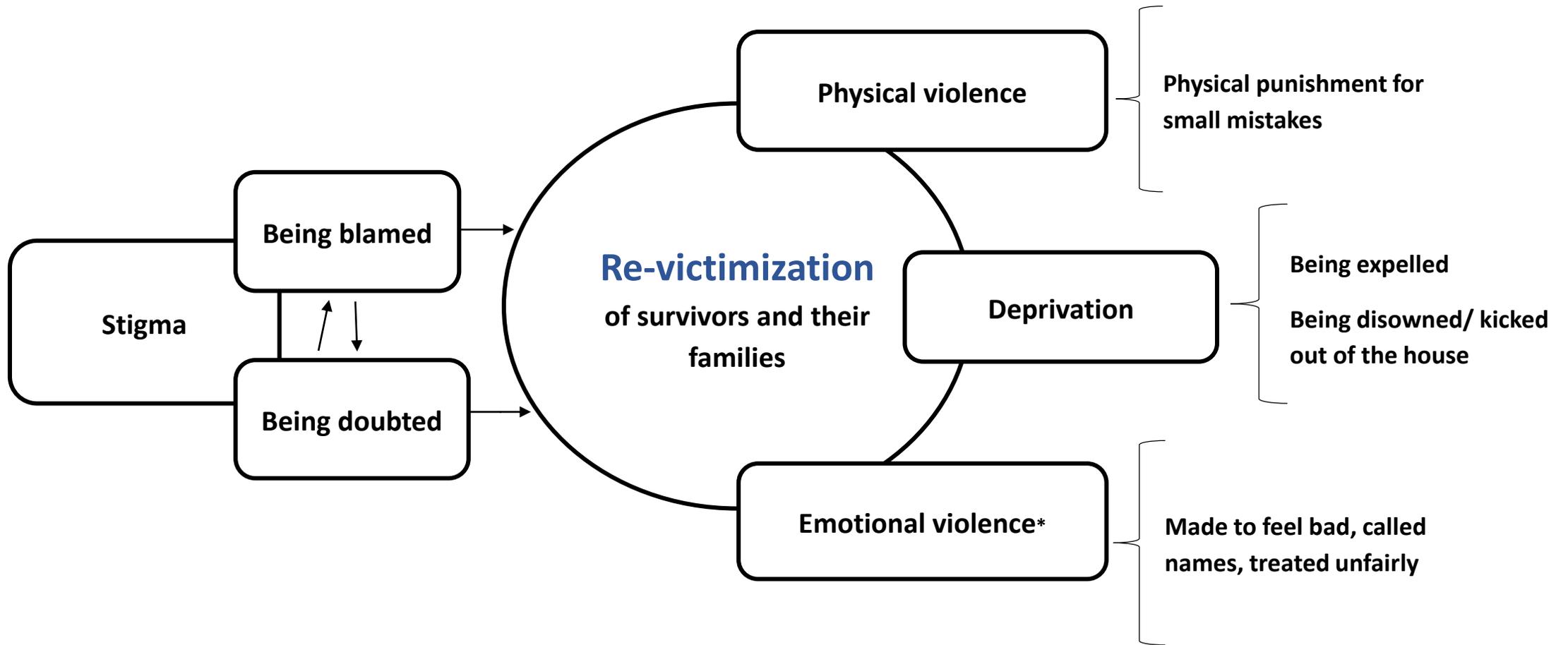


Theme 4: Fear of retaliation against survivors and their families

“If that teacher [perpetrator] gets arrested... the teachers get along very well so you might write an exam and even if you are intelligent, they [other teachers] will make you fail and you will wonder why you failed yet you are intelligent.” - child

“The suspect may decide to kill you after serving his jail term.” - child

Conceptual Framework of Barriers to Disclosure of Child Sexual Abuse in Zimbabwe



*Aspects of emotional violence may also be present in the other forms of violence listed above

CONCLUSION & DISCUSSION

- Children's fears related to disclosure are reinforced by parents' responses
 - Parents' tendency to blame and doubt their child may be influenced by parents' own expectations of being blamed for their child's sexual abuse
- Threats and retaliation against survivors are manifestations of power dynamics that favor the perpetrator
 - Child sexual abusers often are in a position of power and authority over the survivor (Nhundu & Shumba, 2001)

More work to be done



Because children are more likely to disclose abuse to parents, interventions must

- Improve parent-child relationships and communication to help facilitate timely disclosure and response to abuse
- Can also buffer against stigma and other forms of re-victimization



Because revictimization occurs at school and community, interventions must

- Guarantee protection for children who disclose
- Educate children about sexual abuse and available resources
- Address social norms that reinforce stigma against survivors

Thank you

Meagan Cain

GBV Technical Expert, HIV Prevention Branch
U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
nde5@cdc.gov

This work was supported by the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief through the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention under the terms of GH000315. The findings and conclusions presented in this presentation are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official position of the CDC.