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Student Teachers' Perceptions of the Nature, Extent and Causes of Child Abuse by Teachers in Zimbabwean Secondary Schools

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ABSTRACT This study sought to determine: (a) student teachers' perceptions of child abuse within the school context; (b) forms of child abuse perpetrated by teachers on pupils in secondary schools; and (c) causes of child abuse by teachers in schools. A retrospective study was conducted using a purposive sample of 28 participants (15 male, 13 female; aged 21 to 45 years) who were attached to experienced teachers as their mentors for a whole year during their teaching practice. Participants were asked to reflect on how teachers interacted with their pupils in schools. The study assumes that since the perpetrator was no longer present, participants were free to verbalize without fear how their mentors treated their pupils during teaching practice. Participants were asked to write an essay explaining: (i) what they understood by child abuse from the school context; (ii) to indicate forms of child abuse that they observed being perpetrated on pupils by teachers in schools; (iii) to suggest causes of child abuse by teachers in schools; and (iv) to recommend the action that could be taken against child abuse perpetrators in schools. Data were analysed using content analysis. The study found that participants conceptualised child abuse as the maltreatment of pupils by teachers sexually, physically, emotionally and making pupils do domestic activities for teachers at their houses. It is clear from the study that pupils are vulnerable to child abuse and hence there is need to protect them against abuse in schools.