

## CONFRONTING INCEST ISSUES: REAL-LIFE EXPERIENCES OF MALAYSIAN PROFESSIONALS ON INTER-AGENCY COOPERATION

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### ABSTRACT

*Inter-agency cooperation plays a significant part in further preventing and protecting children from any harm resulting from child sexual abuse. In dealing with the issues of incest, collaborative works are highly in need by various agencies as each of the agencies has its roles and expertise to play in handling the incestuous issues as they need to be depended on others in completing the job. It is rather impossible for a single agency to properly manage and handle the issues of incest as they experience difficulties to perform the job well. The purpose of this study is to elucidate the issues and challenges faced by the Malaysian professionals in dealing with the issues of incest, based on their experiences. This study was conducted with eight informants from various agencies who has been directly involves in managing the issues of incest in Malaysia. Based on the findings, six issues and challenges experienced by the professionals are identified namely the issues of sharing information, insufficient staff, too much case to handle, time constraints, cooperating agencies are not being proactive and lack of communication. Handling the issues of incest results in a challenge to the professional and efforts are needed in increasing their capability and capacities so that the victims can be assisted in a considerable and appropriate period of time.*

Keywords: Incest, child sexual abuse, inter-agency cooperation

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### INTRODUCTION

Incest and other types of child sexual abuse should be effectively managed by the authority agencies that have the ability and capability based on the legislation in dealing with the issues and problems, so that incest and other types of child sexual abuse would decline (Mohd Arsyad, 2019). As incest is a very sensitive issue to be addressed, and the victims experiences a trauma, it necessitates procedure the need to address this issue carefully in order to ensure the confidentiality of the victims are upheld. The administration of the incest cases should not only focus on protecting children who are at high risk of being abused, but also on strategizing to reduce the occurrences of the cases by providing early intervention and a proper channel for the victims to obtain help, protecting the secrecy and confidentiality of the victims and the victim's profile, educating and creating awareness among societies about incest issues, and offering assistance (Taib, 2021).

At present, the inter-agency cooperation mechanism has been formed and are being implemented by relevant government agencies, ministries and departments in Malaysia to tackle the issues of child sexual abuse and other types of abuse. Despite long-established collaborative efforts, the agencies continue to struggle to break the barriers or “work in silos” and deliver the services as outlined in the standard operating procedures. The agencies experiencing many difficulties in carrying out their duties effectively and efficiently due to obstacles within their agency as well as between the agencies. The collaborative work by the responsible agencies in dealing with child abuse cases lacks inter-agency communication due to inconsistencies in the approaches taken by the agencies concerned (Ahmad, 2018).

According to Walther (2003), the rights of the children that must be protected were developed under the Geneva Declaration of The Rights of Child in the year of 1959 whereby it consisted of ten principles stating that children shall enjoy special protection and benefits of social security, entitled to growth and development in health, provided with love and understanding, entitled to receive education, as well as provided with the right to have adequate nutrition, housing and many more. These rights should be enjoyed by all children across the world regardless of race, religion, colour, and gender without any elements of discrimination. As a result, while dealing with incest or other types of child sexual abuse, roles, duties, and collaboration of various authorities are critical in ensuring children’s safety. For this reason, relevant authority agencies in Malaysia have been established to safeguard and deal with cases of child abuse, and they have been assisted by other relevant agencies in improving their efforts to overcome the abuse.

### LITERATURE REVIEW

Sexual topics are not publicly addressed in Malaysia since they are considered taboo and should not be discussed openly. Most parents and caregivers are concerned that openly discussing sex-related issues will encourage promiscuous behaviour among family members, particularly children (Aziz, 2016). Individuals who have not been exposed to appropriate sexual-related information are more prone to have misconceptions and hence accept myths rather than real facts. Victims' sensitivity to incest has become one of the hurdles to reporting incestuous conduct (Nen et al., 2012). Aside from societal shame, humiliation and a culture of silence have all contributed to the unwillingness to disclose (Yusof et al., 2015). If the children are left to suffer in silence, they will suffer psychological, emotional, and bodily trauma as they will feel afraid. This will have a detrimental impact on the child's behaviour.

Incest is being more widely recognised as one of the world's biggest issues. However, since incest is considered taboo, it remains a neglected societal issue. Incest instances are growing at an alarming pace from time to time. It is not a new phenomenon; it has been around for over 4,000 years (Tan et al., 2014). Although some individuals or cultures feel that incest is socially acceptable, particularly between two consenting adults, an incestuous act is morally wrong since it contradicts the nature of moral guidance. This follows the natural norm that sex with first-degree relatives (those who share about 50% of their DNA) is not recommended (Herzoq, 2012). Furthermore, incest is despised as inhuman conduct since it is widely acknowledged that having sex with a child is completely unacceptable (Roffee, 2014).

Incest is one of the most prevalent forms of unreported crime (Yusof et al., 2015). Due to the effect of both implicit and explicit pressure for concealment, emotions of guilt, humiliation, shame, being accused, or fear of any potential bad repercussions or threats, exposing it demands a careful and sensitive approach (Collin-Vezina et al., 2013). This is because the majority of incest victims are youngsters who are fragile and rely on the offender for day-to-day survival. Only one of three instances of an incestuous incident is reported to authorities, with the other two cases staying between the culprit and the victim (Nen et al., 2010). Incest incidences are constantly influenced by concerns such as denial, ignorance, awareness, societal stigma, and prejudice. Apart from that, a few incestuous acts are reported to authorities, and few individuals are prepared to recognise them for fear of losing the family's honour and disgrace (Yusof et al., 2015).

Incest instances are being reported at an alarming rate and seem to be on the rise. Incest is said to be one of the most under-reported crimes in Malaysia since it is linked with shame, particularly when the offenders are family members or people who are most trusted. Yildirim et al. (2014) discovered that in most instances of incest, family members choose to keep the situation hidden even when they are aware of it. Despite the under-reported status of instances, Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development documented 1,796 incest cases out of 22,234 sexual abuse cases reported from 2010 to 2017 (Kadir, 2018); while 3,272 incest cases were recorded from 2006 to 2015. (Parliament of Malaysia, 2016). Meanwhile, according to a study conducted by HELP University's Institute of Crime & Criminology (2016), 23.1 % of incest cases involve father and daughter incest, 23.0 % of cases involve stepfather and daughter incest, 12.0 % of cases involve brother and sister incest, and 7.25 % of cases involve cousins. Incest occurs in 5.3 % of cases of brother-in-law incest, 1.6 % of cases of grandpa and grandkids incest, and 1.0 % of cases of grandchildren and step-grandfather incest (Satar, 2018).

Notably, collaborative efforts across all relevant agencies and authorities have been identified as the most effective strategy to address the issues of child-related abuse or any case involving children (Ahmad, 2018). Due to that, inter-agency collaboration is crucial in bridging the gaps possessed by the agencies so that their inter-agency cooperation would provide better outcomes, thus able to safeguard the children while preventing any possibilities of abuse. It is also vital to identify that the roles and function are not limited to addressing the issues that have been discovered; preventive actions must also be initiated so that incestuous incidents and any form of child sexual abuse can be avoided.

Several countries across the world, including Montenegro, Hungary, Moldova, Serbia, Romania, Bulgaria, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Jordan and others have established inter-agency coordination to address the issue of child sexual abuse (Bregu & Delaney, 2016). Further, inter-agency cooperation has been demonstrated to be effective in addressing child sexual abuse issues in the United Kingdom, United States of America, Europe as well as Australasia (Hetherington et al., 2002). In summary, most countries that adopt interagency collaboration in dealing with concerns of child sexual abuse have policy and execution outlined in their Child Act. As a result, they create a protection and welfare team comprised of interdisciplinary authorities who will collaborate in their efforts to guarantee that children's rights are respected, as well as their welfare and safety. Most nations' collaborating agencies include the police, the children's and welfare department, hospitals and healthcare facilities, social activists, non-governmental organisations, municipalities, schools, and other professionals whose roles may change depending on the child's requirements. Most importantly, the government fully finances and supports the joint efforts to ensure the efficacy of implementation.

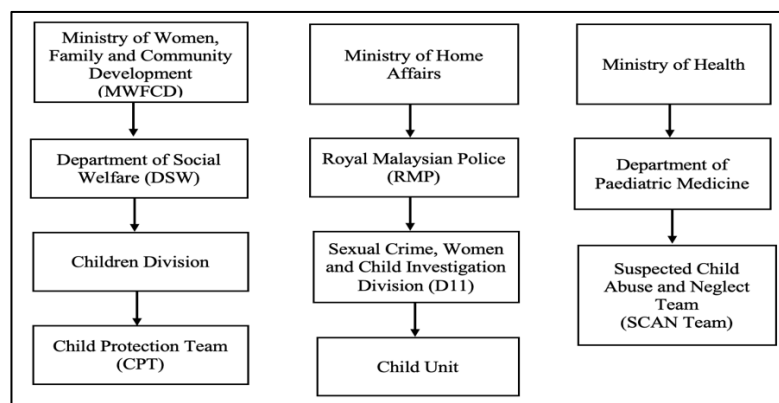


Figure 1: Child Protection Agencies in Malaysia  
Source: Child Protection Agencies in Malaysia (Ahmad, 2018)

In Malaysia, three authorities are largely responsible for dealing with incest and other forms of sexual abuse. The organisations include the Royal Malaysian Police, the Department of Social Welfare, and hospitals across Malaysia. Their roles are crucial in providing victim protection, discovering crimes, channelling reporting, investigating cases, and giving therapy and rehabilitation

to children who have been safeguarded from exploitation. The roles and responsibilities extend beyond providing protection to educating society, particularly parents and caregivers, on how to exercise their responsibilities in ensuring that the children in their care are cared for, protected from potential threats, and entitled to their rights as children.

According to Figure 1, Malaysia's inter-agency collaboration consists of three governmental agencies with various types of work and their own tasks and duties. Because of the unique nature of their job, they will play a vital role and complement each of the agencies in ensuring that child protection is successfully implemented. Each of the agencies has its own department and division that focuses on child abuse. It is critical that all agencies interact, integrate, communicate, and work as a team to handle this issue so that issues may be addressed successfully and quickly. This is corroborated by Ahmad (2018), who discovered that inter-agency collaboration among different accountable authority agencies may successfully address challenges and situations of child abuse. Because the authorities have varying capacities, strengths, and expertise in their respective fields, they may come up with excellent answers to this problem. While each of these three institutions has its own database statistics record on occurrences of abuse (Alavi & Che Din, 2011), the database is not preserved systematically since various agencies gather data in different methods, making it impossible to get trustworthy data (Ahmad, 2018).

Despite having very good cooperation among the team members, some issues and challenges arise in performing inter-agency cooperation, even though has been practised for a long time. These difficulties arise as a result of the different nature of works performed by each of the involving agencies. For instance, the Royal Malaysian Police is responsible for investigating the reports lodged by the victims, the Department of Social Welfare is responsible for providing protection, welfare and rehabilitation for the victims while the hospital will be responsible for treating, curing and taking medical examination towards the victims (Alavi & Che Din, 2011). Thus, these are the hurdles that have been discovered in furthering inter-agency cooperation as all of the participating agencies vary in their respective roles, nature of work and diverse work cultures.

According to Bregu and Delaney (2016), some of the personnel or members of the collaborative agencies may perform ineffectively since information flow and exchange is often fragmented, and the reviews of evaluations are not consistently undertaken. In some circumstances, each agency has own database system that stores statistical data gathered from actual and reported cases. When all relevant agencies have their database system and documented documentation, the output trend and statistics may not be consistent. Supposedly, the data gained should be gathered and analysed collectively so that diverse perspectives, ideas, and analyses based on their expertise can be blended to provide the optimal outcome, solution, or subsequent action related to child abuse problems. Inter-agency cooperation should be viewed as a feasible solution to child protection because it effectively utilises the existing resources and skills of various agencies.

Evidence from prior studies has shown that several issues, such as poor communication, bureaucracies, a lack of funding, a lack of experience and skills, an excessive workload, different policies and standard operating procedures, power conflict, and incorrect perceptions between the involved agencies, can prevent collaborative agencies from performing their roles and responsibilities effectively and efficiently (Newman & Dannenfelser, 2005). While all aforementioned factors have somehow associated with burnout, fatigue and high turnover among professionals which then may influence the productivity of the personnel as well as affect the whole process involved (Nen & Astbury, 2011). While Newman and Dannenfelser (2005) found that collaborative work amongst agencies is frequently difficult to be accomplished due to diverse mandates, protocols, conflict of power as well as facing scarce resources and insufficient knowledge on regards with the issues of child sexual abuse.

## METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a qualitative method in exploring the Malaysian professionals' experiences in handling and managing the cases of incest once they have been discovered. The sample size for this study consists of eight key persons from various responsible agencies and non-governmental agency that have been directly involved in managing incest cases in Malaysia. They consisted of police officers, social workers, counsellors and a protector who worked in incestuous cases. All of the informants are representing their agencies selected from the states of Negeri Sembilan, Selangor, Perak, Sabah and Sarawak (these states projected the highest numbers of reported cases of incest in Malaysia). Thus, it enables the research to gain the generalization on issues based on real-life experiences of the professionals. Each of the key persons represented the relevant agencies involved in dealing with the issues of incest in Malaysia based on their roles, function, and expertise. Each of the key persons was given their pseudo name to maintain the privacy of the informants.

Table: Profile of Key Person

Name of Institution	Key Person	Position	Years of experiences	Types of Assists
Sexual Women and Child Investigation Division, (D11), Royal Malaysian Police	PDRM	Deputy Superintendent, Head of Women, Child and Sexual Crime Investigation (D11)	16 years	Reporting Investigation Protection Law enforcement Advocate

Name of Institution	Key Person	Position	Years of experiences	Types of Assists
Children Division, Department of Social Welfare	JKM 1	Chief Deputy Director, Children Division	20 years	Reporting Protection Investigation Law enforcement Rehabilitation Advocate
<i>Taman Seri Puteri Kuching, Sarawak</i>	JKM 2	Assistant Officer of Community development, Protection and Rehabilitation Unit	4 years	Protection Rehabilitation
<i>Taman Seri Puteri Kota Kinabalu, Sabah</i>	JKM 3	Chief Operational Division	16 years	Protection Rehabilitation
<i>Taman Seri Puteri Batu Gajah, Perak</i>	JKM 4	Counsellor	2 years	Protection Rehabilitation
<i>Taman Seri Puteri Cheras, Selangor</i>	JKM 5	Principal	13 years	Protection Rehabilitation
<i>Rumah Kanak-Kanak Rembau, Negeri Sembilan</i>	JKM 6	Counsellor	7 years	Protection Rehabilitation
Monster Among Us, Selangor	MAU	Committee Member and Treasury	2 years	Advocate Reporting

The qualitative technique aids in comprehending, explaining, investigating, finding, and clarifying circumstances, perceptions, emotions, attitudes, beliefs, and values, as well as the experiences of the study's participants (Kumar, 2011). According to Patton and Cochran (2002), using the qualitative technique allows them to gather and access rich information from respondents by offering questions relevant to the WH question, which are 'what,' 'why,' 'where,' 'when,' or 'how', rather than asking 'how many' or 'how much'.

The core data for this research was gathered via in-depth interviews with important individuals utilising a semi-structured interview approach. In general, an in-depth interview allows to uncover the difficulties' components, genesis, and fundamental causes. In this study, the in-depth interview with the informants was recorded and afterwards transcribed into written papers before the data was analysed.

The application of semi-structured interviews in this study is not only cost-effective but also assisted in establishing rapport during the interview process. Most importantly, the informants were allowed to express their expressions and feeling in their own ways; thus, fostering understanding between the interviewer and informants. It allows for the real experiences of the key persons in dealing with the issues pertaining to incest cases. Apart from that, as no rigid questions was being asked, it provides limitless information as well as time for the researcher to conduct the process of an in-depth interview.

## FINDINGS

### PROFILE OF INFORMANTS

Table 2 presents the background of informants of the key person representing different agencies who works directly in the case of incest in Malaysia. Two of the informants were male, while the remaining six informants were female. Women were favoured to be appointed in managing incestuous cases and other forms of sexual abuse since it requires a very delicate process and it is involving a very sensitive issue. However, this does not mean that male officers were less suitable since both genders have the same experience, skills, knowledge, ability and capability as most of them are well trained. Two of the key persons have less than five years of experience since they need to have sufficient experience and go through several stages of training before they can be employed as social workers. While just one informant has more than five years of experience; the remaining five informants have been involved in handling the issues of incest for more than ten years. Among the assistance given to the victims of incest after their discovery was providing protection, channelling reports, advocating, rehabilitating and law enforcement.

Table 2: Background of Informants

Characteristics	Informants
<b>Gender</b>	
Male	2
Female	6
<b>Working experience</b>	
0-5 years	2
6-10 years	1
More than 10 years	5
<b>Types of Assists</b>	
Reporting	3
Protection	8
Rehabilitation	6
Advocate	3
Law enforcement	2

## ISSUES AND CHALLENGES

This study aims to determine the issues and challenges of the responsible agencies in performing inter-agency cooperation in further dealing with incestuous cases in Malaysia. Based on the findings, six themes were identified during the data analysis, which comprises the issues and challenges faced by the responsible agencies namely information sharing, insufficient staff, too many cases to handle, time constraints, lack of proactiveness and responsiveness by other agencies, and lack of communication.

### INFORMATION SHARING

The first challenge in inter-agency cooperation is information exchange. The findings demonstrate that, although handling the same case, the majority of the agencies did not have full access to the full report. The full report on regards with the case is kept by the agency that received the report in the first place. When the primary agency that receive the reports refer the case to other involving agencies, usually they will not share the full reports obtained from the victims, or the earlier investigation conducted. Inadequate data and information make it difficult to appropriately manage the cases since the other agency that received the referral report from the primary agency did not have complete data and information related to the victims because the cases were not reported to them directly. In the case where the report was received from the hospital, the key person indicates that they can only obtain a summary of the report because hospitals do not provide a complete diagnosis result. This is because the medical information of the patient is considered confidential. Unfortunately, other agencies also employ this method of information sharing as well whereas they will also decide not to share the full report, and will only provide the summary of the reports. As a result, this may cause difficulties in effectively addressing the cases, particularly when the victims exhibit post-traumatic symptoms. With complete access to the data, associated agencies can establish the most appropriate rehabilitation modules and programmes for the victims.

*"Yes... we face some challenges in which most of the time we did not have detailed information about the child, so we need to get the detailed information from the doctor so that we may know and be ready if the children have ADHD (Attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder), hypertension, PTSD and others. So, if we did not get sufficient information then how can we handle them properly? So, we hope that the hospital can give us detailed information, that may help us in providing the children with suitable rehabilitation and care."*

*"Sometimes, it happens that they refuse or are unable to share the detailed information about the children with us, so what we can do is only request the summary of the information, and the same goes for us. We will not provide them with detailed information, but we will just give a summary of the report so that it would be easy if the psychiatrist at the hospital wants to treat the child. So, any sensitive or too private information would not be shared easily".*

### INSUFFICIENT STAFF

Second, several agencies' experiences lack of personnel. As a result, the process of handling cases has been slowed as they need to wait for the officer to become available. One approach to avoiding this is to have a close relationship with the relevant officer so that they may refer the case immediately, even if it is outside their working hours. By having insufficient staff, they also face lack of expertise, necessitating the need to outsource the experts. As a result, these may necessitate several processes, time, and financing, which may affect the process as a whole and cause the inquiry to be delayed. Furthermore, insufficient staff may result in high administrative workloads because the person in charge of addressing the issue is also conducts administrative work. When more than one victim is experiencing trauma, it is difficult, if not impossible, for them to deal with it all at the same time.

*"One of the challenges faced by us is expertise, we have lack of expertise, for example when we face a situation where the children are traumatized, and that time the counsellor is not around, so we will have trouble in handling the children"*

*"However, some of the times, we do agree that in part of JKM, they have insufficient officers, so if the case occurs at night, or outside their working hours, we have to wait like us PDRM, we have enough personnel and we operate 24 hours per*

day. So, it requires a very good relationship with JKM so that if the case occurs beyond the working hours, we can still get help from them"

### **TOO MANY CASES TO HANDLE**

Thirdly, some of the agencies, particularly the hospitals, have cases besides sexual abuse. As a result, they must assess which cases should be prioritised based on their seriousness and needs. Typically, fresh cases are prioritised by the hospital because forensic evidence can still be collected. While in the case that is not new, or they have other cases that need to be prioritised, they must wait for some time, which may create a delay in the processing of the cases.

*"Our hospitals have so many cases that they need to handle, so if the case occurs beyond 24 hours, we will wait for the hospital to set up the time, so we will let them decide on their priorities, and we don't put the blame to the hospital since we truly understand that they are busy [...] And if the case occurs within 24 hours, which is a new case, we will directly send them to the hospital to get treatment and get the forensic evidence such as semen or any physical or sexual injuries if the case happens more than 24 hours... I don't say that we did not want to bring them to the hospital immediately, but we will decide on the priority, maybe we will wait until the next day to bring them to the hospital.*

*"In some circumstances, we do have time constraints, for example, the schedule of treatment, or in dealing with the police, sometimes the process will take a longer time since they might have other cases to handle. So, this may cause a delay in handling the case."*

### **TIME CONSTRAINTS**

Next is time constraints. The investigation process often takes longer than expected since other authorities involved in the case need to focus on other matters. To deal with the other agency, they may occasionally need to wait until the next day or according to regular business hours.

*"In some circumstances, we do have time constraints, for example, the schedule of treatment, or in dealing with the police, sometimes the process will take a longer time since they might have other cases to handle. So, this may cause a delay in handling the case. So yes, time constraints."*

*"However, some of the times, we do agree that in part of JKM, they have insufficient officers, so if the case occurs at night, or outside their working hours so we have to wait, like us PDRM, we have enough personnel and we operate 24 hours per day. So, it requires a very good relationship with JKM so that if the case occurs beyond the working hours, we can still get help from them"*

### **COOPERATING AGENCIES ARE NOT BEING PROACTIVE**

In addition, it has been discovered that some of the participating agencies are not taking initiative to remedy these issues. According to a key person from one of the involved agencies, in some situations, the agencies will not take action until certain disagreeable occurrences occur. In this situation, the agencies should not wait until the victims are harmed to take action. Another issue is that some of the agencies are criticising and blaming one another for handling the report. This is because, they believe it is the responsibility of the other agency to handle these processes while investigating and managing the case.

*"I believe that all responsible agencies should be responsible, and please don't wait until something happens here then only, they will take action. The police need to tell us what we should do to handle the case at the beginning time, and the hospital also needs to provide us with detailed information about the children and don't wait until some undesired things happen in this institution"*

*"In some circumstances, we are facing difficulties in deciding who will make the report to the police. Some agencies said that they are the ones who need to lodge the report, and some agencies said that it is beyond their responsibilities to lodge the report. Another issue is that some of the agencies refuse to send the victims to the hospital for treatment. They said that we have to wait for the protector to come, even though anyone can send the victims, anyone can lodge a report, there is no need to wait until the protector comes."*

### **LACK OF COMMUNICATION**

Lastly, findings discover that some of the participating agencies have failed to properly communicate and interact with other collaborating agencies, especially NGOs. Since both governmental and non-governmental organisations had the same purpose in tackling the issue of child sexual abuse, they should collaborate to educate the public and provide effective channels for victims to seek assistance. Therefore, the key person believes that the authority should contact them (NGOs) and inquire whether they require any help in operating their institution effectively.

*"I believe that the governmental agencies should also take their first action in contacting and collaborating with us, the NGOs. They cannot just simply launch a program; they need to closely communicate with us so that we can reach the community."*

## **DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION**

Inter-agency cooperation and collaboration are required in dealing with cases of child sexual abuse as well as addressing victim protection, since inter-agency cooperation has effectively developed quicker and more proactive responses. Due to the intricacy of the issue, it would be very difficult for a single agency to react appropriately. According to an interview with a senior official from the relevant authorities, there are coordinated activities with other governmental organisations, specialists, and non-governmental organisations. In reality, all of the agencies are aware of their duties and obligations, as well as how they would react to the case upon the discovery of new information. The outcomes of this research show that cooperation and collaboration with many authorities has been the most successful way of dealing with child sexual abuse concerns.

In the case of inter-agency cooperation, each agency plays their role in handling the case, with the Royal Malaysian Police responsible for investigating the victims' reports; the Protector from the Department of Social Welfare responsible for providing protection and welfare for the victims; and the medical officer from the hospital responsible for conducting a medical examination, collecting forensic evidence, and providing appropriate care. Based on the findings, it is clear that the responsible agencies involved in handling incest cases are performing their collaborative work in the post-discovery phase, namely collaborative investigation, collaborative treatment, collaboration, and knowledge sharing in curing and rehabilitation programmes, as well as ensuring the victims' well-being upon their release.

Due to lack of interagency cooperation, handling cases of child sexual abuse, particularly incest cases, has proven to be challenging. Despite the strong relationships and inter-agency collaboration that have been formed and used for many years, findings show that there are several hurdles and challenges encountered during the process as well as in implementing and carrying tasks and responsibilities successfully.

In dealing with cases involving children as the victims of sexual abuse, the flow of shared information has emerged as one of the major issues. Notwithstanding working together to address incest issues, it can be challenging to obtain complete and accurate data from all of the collaborating agencies. Data for each case must be requested because of lack of standardised data that can be combined and retained in a single system available to the involved agencies. The inconsistency in the distribution of the necessary data and information hinders the need to assess the victims and provide them with relevant treatment, cure, and rehabilitation. Bregu and Delaney (2016), in their study, identified inefficiency in information exchange, whereby, when inter-agency collaboration is implemented, certain agencies would perform ineffectively as the flow and exchange of information are frequently fragmented.

Numerous agencies across the study mentioned staff scarcity as a limitation in performing the collaborative work. Lack of employees means having insufficient manpower and knowledge to handle the case, thus the need to hire external experts. Additionally, shortage of workers will increase administrative tasks, forcing the assigned officer in charge of the case to perform extra obligations in addition to their usual responsibilities. It implies that one person would perform many tasks, and it is feared that the burden may lead to physical and mental disturbance of the officers. Engatou (2017) agrees that shortage of personnel will result in inefficient execution of the task assigned, resulting in lack of effectiveness and efficiency in the organization's practice and conduct of the roles and responsibilities from all aspects. Additionally, as people are naturally stressed, increased workloads will have a negative impact on their mental health and lead to anguish, thus, inability to perform effectively.

One type of issue or challenge faced by the agencies may be linked with or caused by other issues. It means that one single issue may create other arising issues. Time constraints caused by personnel shortage will have an impact on the officer's ability to carry out responsibilities. According to Colombini et al. (2012), time constraints have a significant impact on the process of managing child sexual abuse cases and conducting investigations, as well as on the ability to accurately analyse the abuse, particularly when the victims are not disclosing the sexual abuse.

Furthermore, due to the large number of unresolved cases that the other cooperating agencies are dealing with, as well as the various procedures that must be followed, the majority of the agencies are experiencing time constraints as they strive to resolve the cases. According to the experiences of the key persons, they will usually have to wait, and occasionally the procedure will take longer than usual. Here, it is crucial to note that these administrative barriers should be removed in order to streamline the handling of cases after obtaining the findings and avoid the need to wait for the investigating officer of agencies to agencies to undertake and complete the investigation process.

Moreover, proactive action needs must be taken by the involved agencies in response to the ongoing cases. Unfortunately, often, agencies are not amicable in deciding the agency involved to lead the case after receiving the reports from the victims. One agency may claim that the case beyond the agency's job scope to handle such procedure or may warrant the report to another agency that is assigned to handle such case, while some agencies will wait until the assigned personnel takes lead, and only then will proceed for further action. In certain situations, the agencies may not react to the case based on the required procedure, thus leading to untoward circumstances and neglect the sensitivity, privacy, and seriousness of the case.

The lack of linkage and communication between responsible agencies and non-governmental organisations is another barrier to carrying out measures to safeguard children. Non-governmental organisations are most likely to be excluded from attempts to address the problem of child sexual abuse, especially when implementing programmes or policies. The efforts of non-governmental organisations should be recognised since both governmental and non-governmental organisations share the same goals in ensuring children's safety. Since they may influence the community by raising awareness and collaborating to ensure that the children are protected from any potential danger, it is crucial to connected with them. Additionally, non-governmental organisations are

becoming actively involved in directing the reports made by the victims and supporting them in obtaining assistance and protection. Therefore, they believe that the government should get connected with them and work collectively to protect the children.

Particularly, it is pertinent that incestuous cases are properly handled in order to prevent abuses from happening. Incest issues should be handled and addressed with proper management, structure, and methods to prevent the occurrence of re-victimization. Therefore, to resolve the issues effectively and efficiently, each of the agencies must cooperate, integrate, communicate, and work as a team in tackling this issue. This is corroborated by Ahmad's (2018) research, which showed that incidents of child abuse can be efficiently resolved through inter-agency cooperation amongst several governing agencies. The authorities may produce admirable concepts for handling this problem according to their capabilities, strengths, and expertise in the particular field.

Inter-agency cooperation is critical in dealing with problems of child sexual abuse because it encourages higher efficiency in providing better protection and welfare to victims since they have the facilities, personnel, skills, authority, and expertise in dealing with the issues. By integrating all of these aspects, they may fulfil their jobs and responsibilities in a more effective and efficient manner, and most importantly assuring the victims' protection.

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