

Discussion Paper

Working with
Boys and Men
to End Gender Discrimination and
Sexual Abuse of
Girls and Boys



Save the Children

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Save the Children works for:

- a world which respects and values each child
- a world which listens to children and learns
- a world where all children have hope and opportunity

The mission

Save the Children fights for children's rights.

We deliver immediate and lasting improvements to children's lives worldwide.

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Working with Boys and Men to End Gender Discrimination and Sexual Abuse of Girls and Boys

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Preface

I am very pleased to be able to present this short paper on "Working with Boys and Men to End Gender Discrimination and Child Sexual Abuse". It is a very important input into the debate and work on Gender and Sexual Abuse.

According to recent studies, the magnitude of CSA is massive and greater than previously acknowledged. It is apparent that the social welfare system in most countries is incapable of providing appropriate assistance to the vast majority of sexually abused children. This is a very sensitive issue as it touches the most intimate aspects of our lives, and is hence difficult to work with. At the same time, a clear focus and priority against child sexual abuse and exploitation is grounded in an understanding that sexual abuse offends our basic sense of dignity as human beings.

Many Save the Children (SC) organisations have prioritised work in the area of child sexual abuse and exploitation, especially during the last 10 years, often by initiating research and documentation and then moving into development that involves long-term planning of projects and programmes with partners¹. Save the Children has played an important role in breaking the silence and combating child sexual abuse (CSA) and exploitation around the world. At a practical level, through its partners SC has provided shelters, psychosocial support and educational possibilities.

Nevertheless, a consideration of the role of boys and men has largely been neglected in most programmes. The focus has been on the victims - mostly girls, but also a considerable number of boys - rather than on the perpetrators and their situation and problems.

Sexual abuse highlights a feeling of inadequacy in the face of the power imbalances that exist between generations, between sexes, and between groups and races, and exacerbates the lack of a proper attitude and advancement in the direction of recognising the role of sexuality in society (in particular male sexual behaviours).

¹ Heiberg, Turid (2001). *Commodities in Stigma and Shame: An International Overview of Save the Children's Work Against Child Sexual Abuse and Exploitation.*

Concrete action must be taken at local, sub-national, national, regional and international levels if progress is to be made in preventing CSA.

Save the Children is committed to work on child rights programming (CRP). The overall vision is to achieve greater benefits for children by operating coherent programmes based on children's rights. A CRP approach means addressing the root causes of child rights violation, such as unequal power structures (patriarchal structures) and power relations between children and adults, etc. Facilitating the active involvement of girls and boys in developing programmes against CSA is very critical. Equally important is advocacy for children's greater participation in the family. Children's non-participation in families is precisely what perpetrators take advantage of.

This paper discusses the root causes of CSA and suggests ways of addressing CSA through a rights perspective by working with men and boys to end child sexual abuse. CSA is a severe form of child rights violation, and it needs to be considered seriously in the forthcoming UN Study on Children and Violence.

I would like to thank Ravi Karkara and Lena Karlsson for bringing out this important paper. I hope it will help those working with Gender and Abuse to focus on the role of boys and men in a better way for the benefit of children worldwide.

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We thank Herluf G. Madsen for his support in taking forward the work in working with men and boys against gender discrimination and sexual violence against girls and boys.

Last but not the least we would like to thank Judith Amtzis for editing the paper.

We also thank our families for their patience.

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Introduction

This paper is an effort to draw the attention of development practitioners to child sexual abuse (CSA) and the ways child right programming (CRP) can be used to address it. The emphasis here is on working with men and boys to address gender-based sexual violence.

What shapes most children and adolescents, regardless of other circumstances, is the impact on their lives of their societies' gender-based expectations. Societies in general treat girls and boys differently and have different expectations of girls and boys: how they should act, what they should think and want, what choices they should make and so on. Different messages and stereotypes are conveyed to girls and boys through various social institutions like media, schools, the family and others. From an early age, boys and girls become aware of their sex, and soon they learn of the different gender roles and gender hierarchies in society. As they grow older, girls and boys take on strict gender roles, and they may be punished if they cross the gender boundary.

Gender² roles and relations influence decisions that boys and girls are allowed to make concerning their own lives, what games they can play and what professions they should plan to have or are allowed to choose. It also influences how they will relate to the opposite sex. In many countries distrust between the sexes as well as taboos against talking about sex and emotions contribute to unequal gender relations and to the spread of HIV/AIDS. Adolescent boys learn that it is considered masculine to be strong and to dominate, to be sexually active, not to show emotions and to exercise authority over girls, peers and women. At the same time, most cultures praise girls and women for sexual purity and unobtrusiveness, measuring their sexuality by a very different yardstick since they are expected to keep it well controlled. Adolescent girls also learn that females are regarded as emotional and are expected to be submissive to boys and men in all spheres of their lives, particularly when it comes to making decisions.

² "Gender" refers to cultural interpretations of biological sex, definitions of what is considered to be feminine and masculine in particular cultural and social settings, and expectations of women and men, girls and boys with respect to these definitions. These interpretations, definitions and expectations result in differing social, economic and political relationships between females and males in specific societies. (See Save the Children (2003). Gender Guidelines for Child Rights Programming.)

Boys and girls are both vulnerable in relation to sexual and reproductive health as their emerging sexuality concerns them a great deal. In many parts of the world young people are unaware of why their bodies are changing. Sexual fantasies and masturbation lead to feelings of guilt that may have negative health consequences later in life. In many societies information about sex and sexuality is thought to lead to promiscuity and is therefore considered taboo and not to be discussed. Perceptions of children as innocent fails to recognise that children and young people are sexual beings. Societies where high social values are placed on girls' virginity puts pressure on parents and the community to ensure that young women are kept ignorant about sexuality.

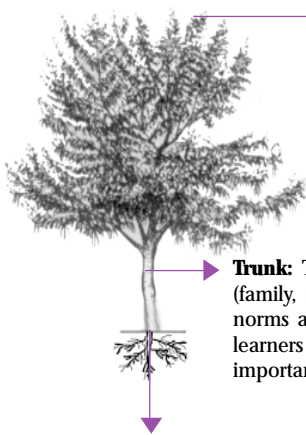
Sexually abused children are typically inclined not to disclose their experiences due to feelings of guilt and shame, bonds of dependence upon the perpetrators and/or their inability to understand the sexual meaning of the abuse. Obviously, this situation is further aggravated if the perception and attitudes of adults toward children discourages girls and boys from expressing their feelings or experiences, either positive or negative. In that case children who are sexually abused are even less likely to share their trauma with their parents, teachers or relevant authorities. Conversely, adults who value children's opinions and create an inclusive environment for children to express themselves will enable children to disclose all types of information freely without fear and ridicule, even in case of sexual abuse.

Patriarchal values and power structures that result in different socialisation processes for boys and girls lead to girls and boys adopting different coping mechanisms and manifesting the impact of abuse and trauma in different ways. Both are likely to experience low self-esteem and a psychosocial impact. Girls tend to internalise and develop more self-destructive behaviours, while boys may externalise behaviour and risk becoming violent. A family or social environment that encourages children to express themselves promotes the development of more resilient behaviour and will help them emerge from the trauma as resilient individuals.

Gender roles and relations, ideas and perceptions are reproduced from one generation to another. We internalise the views and values of the societies of

which we are part and this shapes our attitudes, perceptions, behaviour and decisions later in life. (See the Tree of Socialisation and Gender below). Positive beliefs and norms that recognise girls and boys as RIGHT-holders lead to the development and evolution of child-friendly social institutions that are gender-sensitive, inclusive and respectful of children's voices, and that encourage children's participation in decision-making processes. This in turn will result in a more democratic society that discourages all forms of oppression and discrimination.

Tree of Socialisation and Gender³



Leaves and Fruits: Leaves and fruit depict people's attitudes in the society, and in this case adult behaviours towards children (mostly oppressive). This is transmitted into a seed, which germinates into a new tree that continues to oppress and discriminate against children due to age, gender, ethnicity, disability, etc.

Trunk: The trunk holds together the social institutions (family, religion, education, etc.) that transfer social values, norms and beliefs. Most social institutions see children as learners of adulthood, and as a result give little or no importance to girls' and boys' voices.

Roots: The roots hold the society's norms, values and beliefs that shape us and define the social fabric of people's behaviours towards each other, including the sharing of resources. These norms are generally patriarchal, putting children in a 'powerless' position vis-à-vis adults, and as a result excluding and discriminating against girls. Children are not expected to participate in family or community decision-making processes.

Girls and boys learn culture while also contributing to its continuity and its transformation. Socialisation ideas and practices are a key part of culture; adults use culture to explain or justify child-rearing and socialisation practices, even practices involving unequal treatment, such as gender discrimination and abuse.

³ Ravi Karkara and Lena Karlsson (2003). Socialisation for Encouraging Children's Participation, in Report on Child Rights Programming. Save the Children UK.

Sexual Abuse of Boys and Girls⁴

Child sexual abuse is defined as "the imposition of sexual acts, or acts with sexual overtones, by one or more persons on a child (under 18)" - Save the Children, CSA Draft Policy. It can be fondling a child's genitals, forcing a child to touch another person's genitals, penetration of a child's mouth with a penis, or penetration of a child's vagina or anus by a penis (with or without ejaculation) or another object. It is abuse if such action is threatened. It is abuse whether attempts at such action are "successful" or not.

Many children in South and Central Asia grow up feeling unsafe and insecure. At the same time more and more cases of child sexual abuse are surfacing. Until recently it was assumed that only a small number of children were sexually abused. It was believed that most abusers were strangers or adults in positions of responsibility and only in exceptional circumstances were parents. "Abusers"⁵ come from all social classes and groups and can be either male or female, but statistically men comprise the vast majority of those who sexually abuse children. Abusers may be parents, teachers, employers or religious leaders, members of criminal gangs and networks or people from law enforcement agencies.

Child sexual exploitation⁶ is unlikely to be efficiently prevented unless the diversity of the people who sexually exploit children is fully taken into account. Both men and women, and sometimes children themselves, exploit children sexually in different ways, for many different reasons and in various contexts. The inclination to associate commercial sexual exploitation of children (CSEC) with "paedophilia" in the media and in public debate is counterproductive in this regard since it often fails to recognise ordinary men as abusers and tends to shift attention from the centrality of power and control to notions of sexual deviance. Since "paedophilia" is assumed to be a minority sexual orientation, such usage of the term may distract attention from the widespread sexualisation of children and focus on a kind of person rather than on kinds of behaviour that lead to sexual aggression. It may lead us to disregard possible

⁴ Michael Kaufman, Sexual Abuse of the Young, prepared for "gender, partnerships and participation" section, Programme Division, UNICEF, March 31, 2000.

⁵ Save the Children's Draft Policy: Protecting Children from Sexual Abuse and Exploitation.

⁶ See Save the Children's Position Paper on Child Sexual Abuse and Exploitation (2001).

similarities between persons with a focused sexual interest in prepubescent children and others who sexually abuse children with respect to how they entrap and control children and produce and consume child pornography. Paedophilia is also commonly associated with an interest in boys rather than in girls (Kelly, L. (1996). *Weasel words: paedophiles, Paedophiles and the Cycle of Abuse*. p.33).

"Paedophiles have sometimes been stereotyped as men with a fixed interest in boys, and homophobic individuals and groups have asserted that a relationship exists between homosexuality and child sexual abuse. In reality, statistical evidence on child sexual exploitation points only to the conclusion that there is a relationship between gender and abuse, in the sense that: a) girl children are far more likely to be victims of sexual exploitation than are boy children, and b) males are far more likely than females to commit sexually exploitative acts for personal pleasure. Certainly, some men who self-identify as homosexual sexually exploit boys under the age of 18, just as some men who self-identify as heterosexual exploit girls under the age of 18, but it does not follow that all homosexual men are potential sex exploiters any more than it follows that all heterosexual men pose a threat to girl children. Moreover, Western usage of terms such as 'homosexual', 'heterosexual' and 'paedophile' is not universally meaningful."⁷

Furthermore, the sexual orientation of some abusers constitutes only a partial answer to the question of why people sexually exploit children since third parties often have no sexual motives at all. Whereas most perpetrators are men, many women act as intermediaries. There is a general need for a shift from efforts to identify a specific type of "perpetrator personality" to a wider exploration of the multiple motives, attitudes and conditions of those individuals who sexually exploit children and of the societies in which this exploitation occurs. Focusing only on sexual deviance thus may lead to an underestimation of issues like power and control, both of which play a fundamental role in child sexual abuse.

Abused girls and boys feel intense shame. They fear the consequences of reporting or feel that they have nowhere to turn or nobody to talk to. They might even blame themselves for what has happened. In some cases, survivors of sexual violence completely block out any memory of the violence, even as it

⁷ Julia O'Connell Davidson, *The Sex Exploiter* (2001). Theme paper for the Second World Congress Against the Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children, Yokohama.

is happening. In South Asian societies, girls and boys are socialised not to question adults or adult behaviour towards children, even if it is sexual abuse.

Bautista, Roldan and Garces-Bacsal (2001) emphasise that boys and girls have different ways of coping with distress. During early childhood, boys are found to be less resilient than girls. This is attributed to culturally defined sex-role expectations that inhibit boys from expressing their emotions, and is further compounded by the insufficient time spent with same sex role models or with their fathers. Boys are commonly raised in a feminine environment, mothers being the primary caretakers of children, and this puts boys at a psychological and social disadvantage (Turner et al. 1993).

The tides turn when children hit adolescence. By this time, girls are expected to adopt traditional feminine sex-role behaviour and to be more passive and dependent. Such conditioning leads them to believe that their fate depends more on the actions of others than on themselves. Thus, girls become less resilient than boys, rendering them more likely to experience a sense of hopelessness about the future. Interestingly, Turner et al. characterises children who display signs of resilience as androgynous, saying that these children blend both masculine and feminine characteristics and act in a flexible, non sex-typed manner. These children are both "yielding and assertive, expressive and instrumental, able to care about themselves and about relationships with others." Thus, resilient girls are found to be more autonomous and independent, and resilient boys are more emotionally expressive, socially perceptive, and nurturing. They are not caught in the stereotypical role society assigns them.

Many development organisations are increasingly moving towards adopting a rights-based approach to address violations of rights. Such organisations need to address CSA as well from a child rights programming perspective.

Child Rights Programming (CRP) and CSA

Save the Children is committed to work on child rights programming. The overall vision of this process is to achieve greater benefits for children by operating coherent programmes based on child rights principles. In this case the work is to develop rights-based programmes against child sexual abuse.

"Child Rights Programming means using the principles of child rights to plan, manage, implement and monitor programs with the overall goal of strengthening the rights of the child as defined in international law."⁸

Relevant CRC Articles

Article 19 of the Convention on the Rights of Children expressly says, *inter alia*, that state parties shall take all appropriate measures to protect the child from sexual abuse.

Article 34 and the Optional Protocol to the CRC commit state parties to make and implement national laws against the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography. Article 35 obligates states to take all appropriate measures to prevent the abduction, sale and trafficking of children. Article 39 commits states to promote the physical and psychological recovery and social integration of children who have been victims of any form of neglect, violence, exploitation, torture or other degrading treatment or punishment.

Freedom of expression in Article 13 and the right to be heard in Article 12 are of particular importance when a child wants to speak up about sexual abuse and exploitation. Children who report sexual abuse and exploitation have the right to be taken seriously, to be met with respect and to receive assistance. Good channels for reporting and effective disclosure procedures are essential measures for the protection of children against sexual exploitation and abuse.

Sexual abuse and exploitation is detrimental and violates the child's basic right to life and development as stated in Article 6 and the best interest of the child, set out in Article 3. It must be addressed through a non-discriminatory and inclusive approach, and therefore Article 2 on non-discrimination is also relevant.

Working against CSA from a CRP perspective means:

- **Addressing the root causes of child sexual abuse and addressing unequal power structures (patriarchal structures), power relations between children and adults, etc. (see below).**
- **Putting children at the centre, recognising them as right-holders⁹ and social actors.**

8 Save the Children (2002). Child Rights Programming: How to Apply Rights-Based Approaches in Programming: A Handbook for International Save the Children Alliance Members.

9 Boys and girls of all ages (under the age of 18) from various backgrounds with rights as defined in international law.

- **Giving priority to children and providing a child-friendly environment and child-friendly information on child sexual abuse and sexuality.**
- **Recognising governments as primary duty-bearers accountable to address and take action against CSA.**
- **Seeing parents and families as the primary caregivers and protecting and supporting them in this role.**
- **Using participatory and empowering approaches and working in partnerships and alliances to promote all children's right to address CSA.**

Such work also implies providing long-term goals which are clearly set out in international legal frameworks, and encouraging legal and other reforms, such as the establishment of regular monitoring mechanisms that create a much greater likelihood of sustainable change.

Identification of Key Duty-Bearers

Some of the important duty-bearers (responsible actors) to address for preventing and combating CSA include the state, parents, relatives, NGOs, local communities, teachers, religious leaders, decision-makers, local government, education authorities, law enforcement bodies, the private sector, media, INGOS, UN bodies, police, lawyers, doctors, social workers, psychologists, psychiatrists, training institutes, policy-makers, politicians and the international community.

Immediate Causes of CSA	ROOT CAUSES of CSA
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of appropriate sex education for children (life skills) • Availability of sex-sites on the internet • Denial/ignorance by adults about CSA • Parenting: low participation of children in families (parents do not listen to their children.) • Adults' attitudes towards children, social taboos e.g. blaming the child • Inappropriate laws and ineffective implementation • Sexualisation of children in the media • Poverty, ignorance and low levels of education 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of children's participation in society at large • Patriarchal society: masculinity, roles of men, (boys' sexual behaviour) • Unequal power relations (gender, age, class, disability, caste, religion, etc) • Overall violence in society, including violence against children • Unequal sexual relations between male and females, boys and girls. • Stereotyped gender socialisation.

Men as Perpetrators of Sexual Abuse against Boys and Girls

Sexual abuse of children and adolescents is committed primarily by males. Evidence suggests that more girls are sexually abused than boys, although studies indicate that many more boys than previously suspected are also being sexually abused. In cases where men sexually assault boys, it isn't because they are homosexual, any more than sexual abuse of a girl is because a man is heterosexual. Rather, in both cases - whether by a family member or a stranger - we may be dealing with paedophilia, that is, sexual attraction to, and fixation on children. Men have the opportunity to take advantage of their power and the child's fear, and thus can satisfy themselves at the expense of a young person. Power disparity is a key issue in the sexual abuse of children and young people.

Very little information is available on how men and boys experience their lives. Masculinity is almost always equated with the experience of power. However, most boys and men live in a world where they experience both power and powerlessness. A boy from a poor family could experience powerlessness vis a vis a rich boy or an adult man. This is not to say that boys experience gender inequality in the same way as do girls, but to point out that boys and men can also be partners in the struggle for gender equality, because there is no monolithic masculinity that benefits all men equally.

Since the unequal power relationship prevailing between males and females is recognised as a main cause of gender-based violence, women and girls alone cannot be expected to change the cultural norms and attitudes that are abusive of them.

We Need to Work with Men and Boys

Following are some recommendations on working with men and boys to address child sexual abuse.

- Calling on and organising boys and men in the society to protest against violence and child sexual abuse and to take initiatives for more equal gender roles and relationships.

- Increasing the knowledge on gender issues and child sexual abuse among professionals and in the school curriculum.
- Sharing and analysing good practices of working with boys and men to promote gender equality and to prevent child sexual abuse.
- Promoting life skills education programmes for adolescent boys and girls on healthy personal relationships, gender equality, non-violent conflict resolution and responsible sexual behaviour.
- Promoting programmes for young men on parenting and stressing the benefits for all members in society of men playing a more active role in nurturing their children and abandoning the culture of violence and abuse as a proof of masculinity. Fathers should encourage both girls and boys to express and participate in decisions that affect them.
- Identifying boys and men who break with traditional stereotyped behaviour and internalise gender equality, and engaging them to support programmes that address violence and child abuse. These boys and men can also become good role models for others.
- Working with men and boys to challenge gender inequity in organisations (including children's organisations) and encouraging the development and application of child protection policies as well as gender and diversity policies.
- Working towards bringing about positive relationships in society where men, women, boys and girls can appreciate and respect diversity of sexes, ages, cultures, sexual preferences etc.

There is a great need for development organisations to address these recommendations. Working with men and boys to promote gender equality and child participation is not only important but is fundamental to bring about a paradigm shift in socialisation processes and institutions. Such a shift will lead to a more inclusive and participatory culture that respects the rights of all human beings and denounces all forms of violence against children and women.

Development organisations will have to make conscious efforts to include in all areas of their work components that combat gender discrimination, the sexualisation of children and dominant forms of masculinities. Organisations will also need to strengthen their efforts to address the root causes of child right violations. These are embedded in patriarchal norms and values. It is important

to highlight and reinforce the efforts of boys and men who challenge traditional and stereotypical gender roles in societies, those who question gender discrimination, sexual violence against boys and girls in particular and violence in general. Lessons can be drawn from masculinities work done in the area of gender-based violence against women.

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