



# SEXUAL EXPLOITATION OF BOYS



**BOLIVIA REPORT**  
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# BACKGROUND AND RATIONALE

Violence against children, including sexual exploitation and abuse, is estimated to affect millions of children worldwide and no country or region is 'immune'.<sup>1</sup> Child sexual exploitation and abuse happens to children in all socio-economic groups, of all educational levels, across all ethnic and cultural groups, and in all countries around the world.<sup>2</sup> In recent years, there has been an increasing awareness of the gap in the global understanding of how boys are impacted by sexual exploitation.<sup>3</sup> While data about sexual exploitation of all children is generally lacking, this is even more so when looking at boys specifically. For example, in the rare cases that countries collect prevalence data on sexual exploitation and abuse of children, samples are often limited to adolescent girls, obscuring any understanding of the unique experiences and vulnerabilities of boys.<sup>4</sup> Yet, the limited evidence that is available about boys suggests that in certain contexts, boys are just as heavily impacted as girls, and in some contexts, maybe even more.<sup>5</sup> Boys – regardless of whether they are heterosexual or of diverse sexual orientation – may even face legal consequences when they are victimised by a male offender in countries where homosexuality is criminalised.

Systemic gender norms around masculinity and femininity are important to consider in understanding child sexual exploitation and abuse. These norms typically hold that males are strong and resilient, while females are vulnerable. Such beliefs often hamper equitable and necessary discourse on the sexual exploitation of children of all genders, but especially for boys where the development of policies, practices,

advocacy and research methodologies about the sexual exploitation of children regularly underrepresent or even completely leave out boys. “While many vulnerability factors for sexual exploitation and abuse are common to all genders, boys access to support is unquestioningly conditioned by gender norms, constraining their help-seeking behaviour and their ability to seek care.”<sup>6</sup>

While these circumstances should not detract attention from continued research, advocacy, and support for girls subjected to sexual exploitation, there is a clear need for greater advocacy and a higher quality evidence-base on the sexual exploitation of children of all genders to better inform all work to prevent and respond.

## *A Global Boys' Initiative*

As the programmatic responses to identify and meet the particular needs of boys are scarce, ECPAT International launched the ***Global Initiative to explore the sexual exploitation of boys*** which activates our global network of member organisations in a range of research and response activities focused on boys. To meet the initial challenge of such limited data, in 2020-21, the Global Boys' Initiative embarked on a series of research projects in 10 countries around the world, to shed light on understanding sexual exploitation involving boys, how they came into these vulnerable situations and what their needs are in terms of prevention, protection and services. Bolivia is an important target country for the study because whilst it has robust national legislation criminalising various crimes of sexual

1 Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary General on VAC. (2019, July). *Keeping the Promise: Ending Violence against Children by 2030*. New York: United Nations.

2 ECPAT International. (2020). *Summary paper: Sexual Exploitation of Children in Travel and Tourism*. ECPAT International: Bangkok. p. 4.

3 Josenhans, V., Kavenagh, M., Smith, S., & Wekerle, C. (2020). *Gender, rights and responsibilities: the need for a global analysis of the sexual exploitation of boys*. *Child Abuse and Neglect* 110 (1).

4 The Economist Intelligence Unit (2018) *Methodology paper Out of the Shadows: Shining light on the response to child sexual abuse and exploitation – a 40-country benchmarking index*, London: The Economist Intelligence Unit. 3.

5 Davis J and Miles, G (2015), “They didn’t help me: They shamed me.” *A Baseline Study on the Vulnerabilities of Street-Involved Boys to Sexual Exploitation in Manila, Philippines*. Manila: Love 146.

6 Josenhans, V., Kavenagh, M., Smith, S., & Wekerle, C. (2020). *Gender, rights and responsibilities: the need for a global analysis of the sexual exploitation of boys*. *Child Abuse and Neglect* 110 (1).

exploitation against children, and there is no distinction between boys and girls under the legislation, there remains room for improvement to ensure boys genuinely receive the protection that the law establishes.

### ***This Report***

Consortio ECPAT Bolivia has been at the forefront of actions to prevent and respond to sexual exploitation of children in Bolivia since 2015.

In partnership with the ECPAT International secretariat, they led this ground-breaking research project into the sexual exploitation of boys in Bolivia during 2020-21. The study was based upon primary field research (with frontline

social support workers who support sexually exploited boys in Bolivia) as well as secondary data (a desk review of Bolivia's legal framework that protects children from sexual exploitation and a literature review – with a focus on boys). By identifying core themes emerging from this study, the results captured in this report are intended to inform service improvements to ensure that they are gender-sensitive and accessible for children of all genders. It is hoped that the results may also help to break down the stigma and taboos surrounding boys' experiences of sexual exploitation and abuse. Clear recommendations for improvements that are driven by the evidence are also provided.



# COUNTRY CONTEXT

Bolivia is situated on the coast of South America, with a population of just over 11.5 million people,<sup>7</sup> 4.2 million of which are under the age of 18.<sup>8</sup> It is established that poverty increases children's vulnerability to sexual exploitation,<sup>9</sup> and this is true of children in Bolivia, particularly those living in rural areas.<sup>10</sup> In fact, as a result of high poverty rates, 14% of children in the country are estimated to be engaged in child labour<sup>11</sup> to provide income for their families,<sup>12</sup> a circumstance known to lead to sexual exploitation.<sup>13</sup>

There is a distinct lack of research and evidence available with regards to the scale and effects of sexual exploitation of children, especially boys, in Bolivia. Adult prostitution in Bolivia is not regulated and hence allowed. No data exists showing that boys are exploited in licensed brothels in Bolivia, however, the exploitation of children in prostitution often operates on the fringes of adult prostitution,<sup>14</sup> and some evidence from previous studies confirms that boys in Bolivia are subjected to exploitation in prostitution. A 2015 report identified that boys who live on the streets are exploited in organised prostitution, including in unlicensed venues in larger cities like La Paz and El Alto.<sup>15</sup> While old, a 2012 study reported street-based prostitution involving teenage boys taken by offenders from known city landmarks to other locations by car.<sup>16</sup> Furthermore, prostitution can thrive in key tourist spots yet there are no provisions under the Bolivian criminal legislation that contain offences specifically addressing the sexual exploitation of children in travel and tourism.

It was also identified in this study that exploiting boys through prostitution tended to be more of a clandestine crime due to the fear of social reprisal for engaging in homosexual relations.<sup>17</sup> While homosexuality is not criminalised in Bolivia, young people with diverse sexual orientation, gender identity and expression (diverse-SOGIE) still experience significant discrimination,<sup>18</sup> and perceptions remain that promoting and implementing educational actions and programmes that address gender identity and promote the rights of diverse SOGIE people will promote 'promiscuity'.<sup>19</sup> This stigma impacts the boys exploited in prostitution, regardless of their identified sexuality, thereby decreasing the likelihood of the crimes against boys being reported.<sup>20</sup>

There is very limited information or data available regarding online or technological roles in child sexual exploitation within Bolivia. However, with the percentage of the population using the Internet rising from 1.44% in 2000 to 47% in 2019,<sup>21</sup> it is clear that there may be potential and growing new vulnerabilities for children. The misuse of available technologies provides offenders with many ways to contact, offender groom and exploit children. In addition, the anonymity of the Internet facilitates the exchange and dissemination of child sexual abuse materials.<sup>22</sup> With this in mind, it is of the upmost important for Bolivia to have a strong legal protection in place to safeguard children from all forms of online sexual exploitation.

7 UNICEF. (2021). *State of the World's Children 2021*. 188.

8 *Ibid.*

9 ECPAT International. *Power, Impunity and Anonymity*. 43.

10 UNWFP. (2021). *Plurinational State of Bolivia*.

11 UNICEF. (2021). *State of the World's Children 2021*. 231.

12 Save the Children. (2020). *The Hardest Places to be A Child: Global Childhood Report 2020*.

13 UNICEF. (2021). *Child Labour*.

14 ECPAT International. (2020). *Summary Paper: Exploitation of Children in Prostitution*. 6.

15 *Ibid.* 33.

16 Vuela Libre. (2012). *Diagnóstico sobre violencia sexual comercial en Bolivia*.

17 *Ibid.*

18 ECPAT Bolivia. (2021). Personal Communication.

19 *Ibid.*

20 *Ibid.*

21 ITU. (n,d). *Individuals using the Internet*.

22 ECPAT International. (2020). *Summary Paper on Online Child Sexual Exploitation*. Bangkok: ECPAT International.

## **International, Regional and National Legal Commitments**

Bolivia has demonstrated its strong commitment to the protection of children's rights through ratifying several international and regional instruments to protect children against sexual exploitation. The main international instrument underpinning the protection and defence of children's rights is the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child,<sup>23</sup> which was ratified by Bolivia in 1990. In 2000, in response to the rising concern of trafficking of children for sexual exploitation as well as other forms of sexual abuse and exploitation, the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography<sup>24</sup> was adopted. Bolivia acceded to the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on a communications procedure in 2013. The country has also adopted other key instruments in its attempt to protect children from sexual exploitation and abuse.<sup>25</sup> Through ratifying these instruments and agreeing to ensure their effective implementation and enforcement by codifying them in domestic laws, Bolivia has made good progress in legislatively addressing sexual exploitation of children. As such, in the past decade, Bolivia has adopted and amended criminal provisions and procedural laws

that help to protect children from sexual abuse and exploitation. In particular, the enactment of the Law no. 263 Against Human Trafficking in 2012<sup>26</sup> and the Child and Adolescent Code in 2014<sup>27</sup> have been important in prioritising the protection of children. Under the Bolivian legislation, any child under 18, irrespective of gender, will be afforded the same protection.

With the growth in travel and tourism in the last few decades, it has become easier for individuals to travel abroad and commit crimes against children.<sup>28</sup> In regard to Bolivia's criminal jurisdiction, the Criminal Code states that it will apply to all crimes committed within Bolivia or those crimes committed abroad the results of which have occurred in Bolivia.<sup>29</sup> This active territorial jurisdiction allows Bolivia to prosecute illegal conduct, including crimes related to sexual exploitation of children, by their own citizens that has been carried out abroad. Positively the legislation does not impose a double criminality requirement on the extraterritorial jurisdiction. Bolivia is a signatory to the Inter-American Convention on Extradition, comprised of 16 different countries within the wider region.<sup>30</sup>

Nevertheless, despite such a comprehensive legal framework, legislative gaps do exist and there is scope for further enhancing the legal protections afforded to children as discussed in section 5.

23 [UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. \(1989\).](#)

24 [Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography. \(2000\).](#)

25 The International Labour Organisation Convention No. 182 Concerning the Prohibition and Immediate Action for the Elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labour (ILO Convention No. 182) was ratified by Bolivia in 2003, and the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children supplementing the UN convention against Transnational Organised Crime (UN Trafficking Protocol) in 2001. In terms of regional commitments, Bolivia ratified the Inter-American Convention on International Traffic in Minors in 1996.

26 Under Article 35 of the Law no. 263 Against Human Trafficking (adopting Article 322 of the Criminal Code) it is illegal to pay in money or kind, either directly to a child or adolescent or to a third person, to have any kind of sexual, erotic or pornographic activity with the child in order to satisfy interests or sexual desires. Further, as "commercial sexual exploitation" is listed as one of the purposes of trafficking under Article 34 of Law no. 263 Against Human Trafficking (modifying Article 281 bis of the Criminal Code), it could potentially be invoked in order to prosecute those involved in the exploitation of children in prostitution as well as online child sexual exploitation.

27 Article 148 of the Child and Adolescent Code states that all children have the right to be protected from any violation of their sexual integrity. The sexual integrity of children includes sexual violence, sexual exploitation and the sexualisation of minors.

28 ECPAT International. (2020). [Summary paper on sexual exploitation of children in travel and tourism](#), 1.

29 Plurinational State of Bolivia. (1997). [Código Penal](#) (as amended in 2017). Article 1.

30 OAS. (1981). [Inter-American Convention on Extradition: Signatories and Ratifications.](#)

# METHODOLOGY

The main purpose of the research in Bolivia was to build an empirical base for better understanding of the sexual exploitation of boys. To generate new primary data, the methodology included a survey of frontline support workers with both quantitative and qualitative components, as well as a documentary analysis of national legislation related to sexual exploitation and abuse of children. The research in Bolivia had two main aims:

- *To measure the access to, and quality and effectiveness of, support services regarding sexual exploitation and abuse that are available to boys in Bolivia.*
- *To identify the legal gaps, barriers, and opportunities in addressing the sexual exploitation of boys using a standardised method to review national legal frameworks.*

## Frontline Support Workers' Survey

Workforce surveys have increasingly been used as a tool in research to gain an understanding of the effectiveness of social support systems. Most commonly these surveys are used by health<sup>31</sup> and social work professions<sup>32</sup> to measure service delivery effectiveness and to examine the efficiency of public spending. Social support to children who are subjected to sexual exploitation and abuse is generally provided within the broader context of child protection.

Organisations in Bolivia who provide child protection support services were identified by ECPAT Bolivia. While the research focus was boys, very few services focus only on this cohort, therefore, the sample includes a range of service providers working on sexual exploitation of children in any form (convenience sampled and mostly urban based which is where the services tend to be concentrated). Once identified, survey administrators from ECPAT Bolivia contacted them

to explain the survey and invite the participation of staff. Participants were included on the basis that they were over 18 years of age, with at least twelve months' experience in service provision and had a current caseload which included children.

An online survey which consisted of 121 multiple choice and short open-answer questions was developed in English in consultation with the Global Boys Initiative Steering Committee. The draft tool was then translated to Spanish, and in collaboration between ECPAT International and ECPAT Bolivia, was checked and contextualised, and pilot-tested with a small number of local social support workers. 49 frontline service providers from Bolivia who currently provide services for child victims of sexual exploitation fully completed the survey. Nine partial responses were also included in the analysis for the completed items. The majority (78%) identified as female and 22% identified as male. Most of the sample (74%) had degrees in social work, psychology or law. 21% had spent more than 10 years providing support to children.

Self-administered online tools alone (emailing a survey link) have notoriously low participation rates. Thus, the design opted for in-person administration (but using an online tool). The administrators explained participation, sought written consent, and provided trouble-shooting and guidance throughout completion of the survey. The personal connection helped motivate participation.

As part of the survey, frontline support workers were given five hypothetical scenarios about sexual exploitation, which reflected unequal power relationships, gender norms and other intersectional vulnerabilities. Questions were interspersed as the scenario unfolded to unpack different attitudes and knowledge. Following each scenario, participants were asked to describe what practical steps they would take if they were

31 Magadzire, P M et al. (2014, November) [Frontline health workers as brokers: provider perceptions, experiences and mitigating strategies to improve access to essential medicines in South Africa.](#)

32 Sadeghi, T and Fekjaer, S. (2018) [Frontline workers' competency in activation work.](#) International Journal of Social Welfare. 77-88; Netsayi, M (2019) [Perceptions of frontline social workers on their contributions agenda for social work and social development.](#)



supporting the children depicted. Their responses are interspersed throughout this report with the full scenarios and summarised responses presented in Annex 1.

Data collection took place between April and June 2021. Once data collection was completed, open-ended responses were translated to English, and cleaning and analysis was completed by an expert data analyst engaged by ECPAT International. Once completed, the analyst consulted the results with ECPAT Bolivia for further insights and to validate the findings.

### *Analysis of Legislation*

A comprehensive analysis of the Bolivian legal framework addressing the sexual abuse and exploitation of children, with a focus on boys, was undertaken as a collaboration between ECPAT Bolivia and ECPAT International. The analysis of the legal framework was conducted utilising a method and tools developed by ECPAT International. In particular, a checklist including approximately 120 points and sub-points was created to support the development of the analysis and ensure its comprehensiveness as well as consistency across countries.

### *Ethical Issues*

Given the inherent vulnerability of children, research on child sexual abuse and exploitation must be designed in ways that abide by strict ethical standards.<sup>33</sup> For this project, ECPAT International convened a panel of three global experts for an independent third-party review of the proposed methodology. A detailed research protocol that included mitigations for ethical risks developed, along with draft tools, was developed and shared with the panel. Detailed feedback from the panel was accommodated in two rounds of review before the project commenced.

Sampling support workers - rather than children themselves - has the additional ethical benefit of reducing the need to engage large numbers of

children in research who have had potentially traumatising experiences. As such, the experiences of boys have come from those working first hand with them.

Before conducting the online survey, all participants were informed about the purpose of the study and consent was obtained as an integrated part of the online survey tool. If any participant wished to withdraw from the study, they were free to do so at any time. Participants were also informed that their responses would be used to write a research report and to protect participant anonymity, names would not be requested at any stage of completing the survey. Qualitative data from frontline support workers in this report is identified with codes (e.g. FW 86).

### *Limitations*

A limitation occurred as a result of the inclusion criteria. During design, the intent was to include frontline support workers who had recent experience of supporting children directly. Thus, inclusion criteria included requirements of recent work with children “within the last 12 months”. As data collection occurred in the first half of 2021, the impacts of COVID-19 restricting some service providers from being able to directly work with children became evident.

Finally, it should be noted that the data is not statistically representative of the experiences of all frontline social support workers in Bolivia. However, the estimates, perceptions and experiences reported here offer valuable insight into an under-researched area and shed light on the access and quality of social supports for boys subjected to sexual exploitation and abuse in Bolivia. The findings are presented under emerging thematic issues around boys’ vulnerabilities, abilities to access support services and frontline worker’s ability to provide support to their needs.

33 ECPAT International. (2019). *Guidelines for Ethical Research on Sexual Exploitation Involving Children*. Bangkok: ECPAT International.

# A THEMATIC ANALYSIS

The analysis of the Bolivia research findings resulted in an emergence of critical themes which summarised the frontline workers' experiences of the often hidden and neglected vulnerabilities and sexual exploitation of the boys that they came in contact with. Such a thematic framework helps clarify why the sexual exploitation of boys gets such little attention in Bolivia despite frontline workers' awareness that the problem exists. The analysis of the vulnerabilities of these boys exposed the myriad of factors that explains why boys have little choice but to withdraw behind the gender-based norms of masculinity where they are expected to be independent, strong and resilient. They thus are forced to adapt to exploitative and abusive situations, suppress their feelings of hurt and vulnerability and usually avoid seeking help. All these experiences commonly proceed from the same regressive, patriarchal gender norms and expectations. Thus, the framework presented below provides a window into how frontline workers view the sexual exploitation of boys and with further analysis helps provide learnings for key duty-bearers to provide specific and tailored measures to better prevent and respond to this crime for all children.

## HIDDEN AND NEGLECTED VULNERABILITIES

The context that makes both boys and girls vulnerable to sexual exploitation is tied to stereotypical social norms about gender (see section below), which in the case of boys, often views them as invulnerable to sexual exploitation<sup>34</sup>. Responses to a question asking frontline workers to summarise what "boys tell you are the most serious problems they faced" confirmed this as 72% identified "beliefs that

boys are strong, not vulnerable, and able to protect themselves. This assumption of male invulnerability means that boys' involvement in sexual exploitation continues to go largely undetected and unaddressed which can result in a lack of protection, delays in them disclosing exploitation, resulting in negative effects on their physical, sexual and mental health.<sup>35</sup> Boys' more hidden vulnerabilities can be masked by what is often viewed by helping professionals as apparent agency and willingness towards the sexual exploitation they are subjected to by adult offenders.<sup>36</sup>

### *Interlocking vulnerability factors impacting boys*

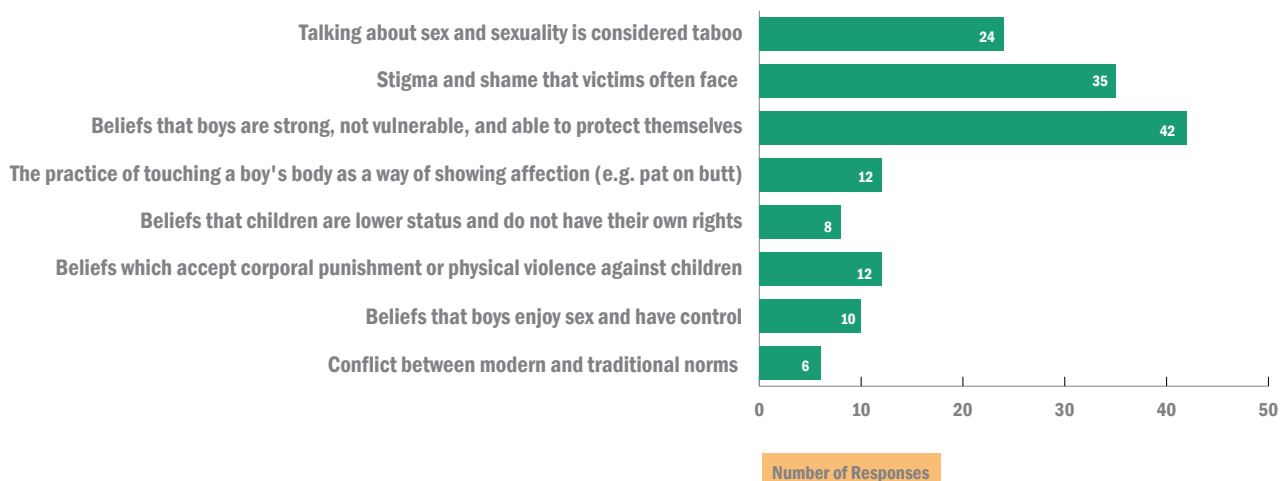
Frontline workers were provided with two extensive lists of factors that could potentially impact boys' vulnerability to sexual exploitation and asked to identify those that had the greatest impact in Bolivia (see figures 1 and 2). The selection of factors on this list was based on findings from research and practice in a diverse range of settings – taking into account both high and low income country contexts of the 10 target countries. The responses from workers in Bolivia overwhelmingly showed that social norms in Bolivia dictating that males should be strong, protect themselves and be brave were the key vulnerability. The other main factors which workers felt could increase boys' vulnerability to sexual exploitation was the stigma and shame facing victims of sexual violence (60%) and the fact that talking about sex and sexuality is considered taboo (41%). These factors strongly discourage reporting or help-seeking for boys who grow up believing that they should not allow themselves to acknowledge or talk about painful experiences.

34 Josenhans, V., Kavenagh, M., Smith, S., & Wekerle, C. (2020). *Gender, rights and responsibilities: the need for a global analysis of the sexual exploitation of boys*. *Child Abuse and Neglect* 110 (1).

35 ECPAT International. (2021). *A global review of existing literature on the sexual exploitation of boys*. Bangkok: ECPAT International.

36 Petersson, C. and Plantin, L. (2019). *Breaking with Norms of Masculinity: Men Making Sense of Their Experience of Sexual Assault*. *Clinical Social Work Journal* 47: 372-383.

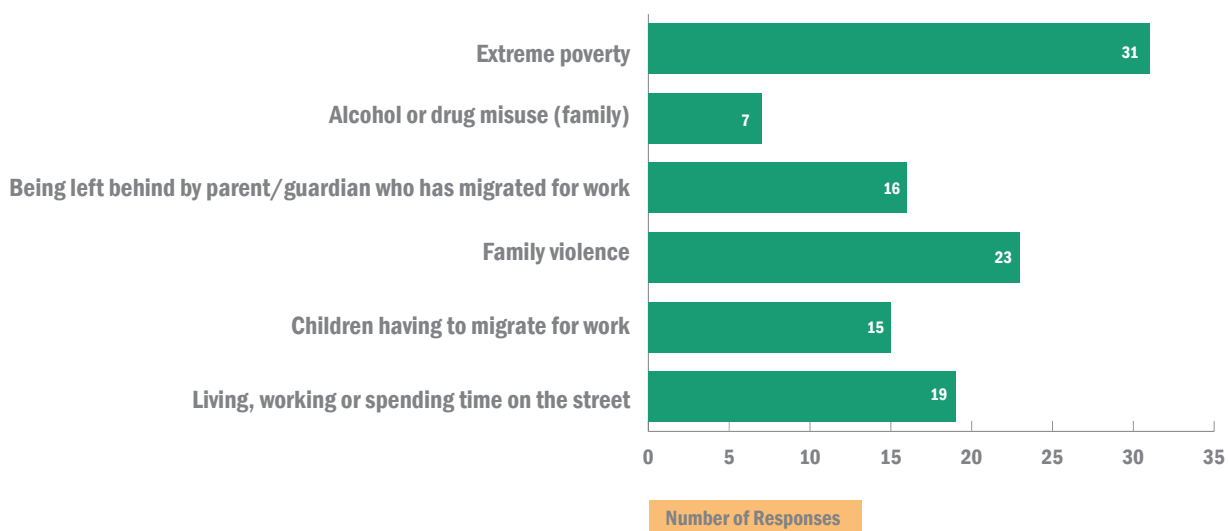
Figure 1: Most common beliefs and practices which influence boys' vulnerability to sexual exploitation.



Any boy, regardless of socio-economic background can be subjected to sexual exploitation. However, the factors that workers identified as most commonly placing boys at higher risk in Bolivia were identified as 'extreme poverty' (53%); family violence (40%); and 'living, working or spending time on the street' (33%). The latter can easily result in boys becoming involved in street-based prostitution or at public places such as beaches, parks and entertainment areas.<sup>37</sup> One frontline worker explained in the survey that identifying

at-risk boys (and girls) must be creative, such as "contacting them in the streets and risky areas, doing field studies by talking with boys, girls and adolescents who sell sweets, clean windows, polish shoes, etc." (FW 102) This could lead to avenues for further outreach as another frontline worker suggested to focus on boys "by making campaigns in red-light districts where cases exist." (FW 40) Moreover, boys are also vulnerable at transit hubs, where contacts with travelling child sex offenders are easy and anonymous.

Figure 2: Most common social and economic factors that influence boys' vulnerability to sexual exploitation.



37 Josenhans, V., Kavenagh, M., Smith, S., & Wekerle, C. (2020). Gender, rights and responsibilities: the need for a global analysis of the sexual exploitation of boys. *Child Abuse and Neglect* 110 (1).

One frontline worker mentioned a specific case they attended:

***“An adolescent who was involved in commercial sexual violence, received money, security, food and in some cases hotel accommodation. They were rejected by family for being non-binary, and it forced them to live in the streets, a stage where the problem of commercial sexual violence intensified.” (FW 108)***

This highlights that whilst boys and young people of any sexual orientation or gender identity are at risk from child sexual exploitation, there are specific vulnerabilities that relate to boys and young people who are of diverse SOGIE: gay boys or transgender young people who are unable to comply with dominant heterosexual social norms, may attempt to keep their sexuality hidden by engaging in sex with male strangers, opening them up to risks of exploitation. Furthermore, prejudices against boys perceived as being homosexual were also felt to limit the likelihood of them accessing support: *“with adolescents, who due to their gender are not accepted by their family, creating rupture; they end up in the streets and are often victims of sexual violence, without recognising the risk they are exposed to.”* (FW 106)

Some boys and young men experience child sexual exploitation in the context of gangs and/or offending behaviour, including from peer pressure: *“Having friends who are involved in sexual exploitation makes it a high risk situation.”* (FW 72) Often it is the offending that is first noticed and responded to by professionals. This could explain why so many child sexual exploitation referrals come through the criminal justice settings: *“the male victims are least likely to access support services, the cases I attended were generally referrals by the police as a result of raids.”* (FW 56) Where young people are involved in gangs, males are generally assessed in relation to violence and drugs, and child sexual exploitation can be overlooked.

Finally, there are potential gaps in the vulnerabilities identified by workers from the Bolivia survey.

Research has long established the connection between vulnerability to child sexual exploitation and disabilities.<sup>38,39</sup> Yet there is markedly less accessible information for children with disabilities.<sup>40</sup> From the frontline workers survey, no participants identified disability as a key vulnerability although one frontline worker noted that children with disabilities can have *“shame in society, feelings of blame.”* (FW 37)

In short, the Bolivia research has shown that boys are likely to be especially vulnerable from a range of potentially interlocking vulnerabilities as they experience poverty, family violence, homelessness, and discrimination within the community and also from law enforcement and service providers. These findings suggest a need for further research with boys directly about the specific vulnerabilities they describe, as well as for targeted training for social support workers that is inclusive of all boys.

Raising awareness of risk factors was considered the main strategy for reducing vulnerabilities:

***“Take them to community spaces where prevention measures about risk factors are coordinated; implement guidance actions, raise awareness about the risk factors and violation of the rights of the boys, girls and meanwhile create protective networks to generate assistance in learning centres in the whole community to diminish the risks the boys and girls are exposed to. However, to build commitment, the responsibilities of municipal, educational, police authorities and communities are important for changing the risk factors mentioned.” (FW 110)***

38 NSPCC. (2019). [Parents’ and carers’ views on how we can work together to prevent the sexual abuse of disabled children.](#)

39 United Nations Children’s Fund. (2020). [Research on the Sexual Exploitation of Boys: Findings, ethical considerations and methodological challenges.](#) UNICEF, New York.

40 Save the Children & Handicap International. (2011). [Out from the shadows: sexual violence against children with disabilities.](#)

## Family Dysfunction

Family violence and dysfunction are consistent early risk factors (and often the strongest) that predate the onset of sexual exploitation of boys. In the Bolivia survey data, 40% of respondents identified this as a major concern with 12% further identifying alcohol or drug misuse within the family. The global literature indicates that family dysfunction has also been found to be a consistent correlate with boys' sexual exploitation, particularly as boys may be at higher risk than girls as boys are more likely to run away from home or end up living on the streets.<sup>41</sup> Indeed, many of the surveyed frontline workers in Bolivia identified family dynamics, in particular violence and abuse in the home, as a precursor to sexual exploitation of boys that often leads to them running away from home: *"That they come from a violent family and they couldn't stand the violence at home so that's why they decide to leave home."* (FW 104)

Parental issues such as drug and alcohol misuse or intimate partner violence have been shown in research to correlate with poor family attachment which can be associated with the greater likelihood of boys experiencing sexual exploitation.<sup>42</sup> The survey responses confirmed such trends, for example: *"family problems, absence of their parents, lack of affection at home, violence, alcohol consumption"* (FW 122) which can manifest into similar negative coping strategies amongst boys: *"risks from experimenting with drugs, prevention of homelessness."* (FW 129) Ultimately, this can translate into mental health issues, particularly depression, anxiety and anger. One frontline worker noted that *"self-esteem issues, problems living with family and anxiety issues"* (FW 37) were presenting factors for boys. Offenders can exploit these circumstances through grooming, offering them places to stay or providing alcohol or drugs which perpetuates the boys' dependency. Substance misuse can easily serve as a form of 'self-medication' to help address the distress associated with child sexual abuse and exploitation.<sup>43</sup>

Where frontline workers are sensitive to these family dynamics, substance abuse and homelessness prevention services can become a key approach to identifying and supporting these boys, particularly for the prevention of re-victimisation and further trauma:

*"It is important to try finding secure spaces for these boys, given that in the majority of the cases the reason why these children find themselves in a vulnerable situation is because they come from families with several problems (family violence, alcohol misuse) which is why support should be provided to the child as well as the family. In the case that the family cannot assume their role, find a space where the adolescent can best develop."* (FW 57)

## BOYS LIVED EXPERIENCES

From the experience of the frontline workers, it appears that boys aged 11-15 years old are generally considered more vulnerable to sexual exploitation and abuse (40%). This is a little lower than is found with girls of that age (50%). Adolescent boys aged 16-17 years was the next largest group (31%), demonstrating perhaps the overall independence and greater mobility of adolescents in Bolivia.

### Types of sexual exploitation observed

The frontline workers were asked to think separately about the boys and girls they supported and indicate different forms of sexual exploitation and abuse they encountered:

41 ECPAT International. (2021). *A global review of existing literature on the sexual exploitation of boys*. Bangkok: ECPAT International.

42 Reid, J. A. & Piquero, A.R. (2016). *Applying General Strain Theory to Youth Commercial Sexual Exploitation*. *Crime & Delinquency*, 62(3): 341-367.

43 ECPAT International. (2021). *A global review of existing literature on the sexual exploitation of boys*. Bangkok: ECPAT International.

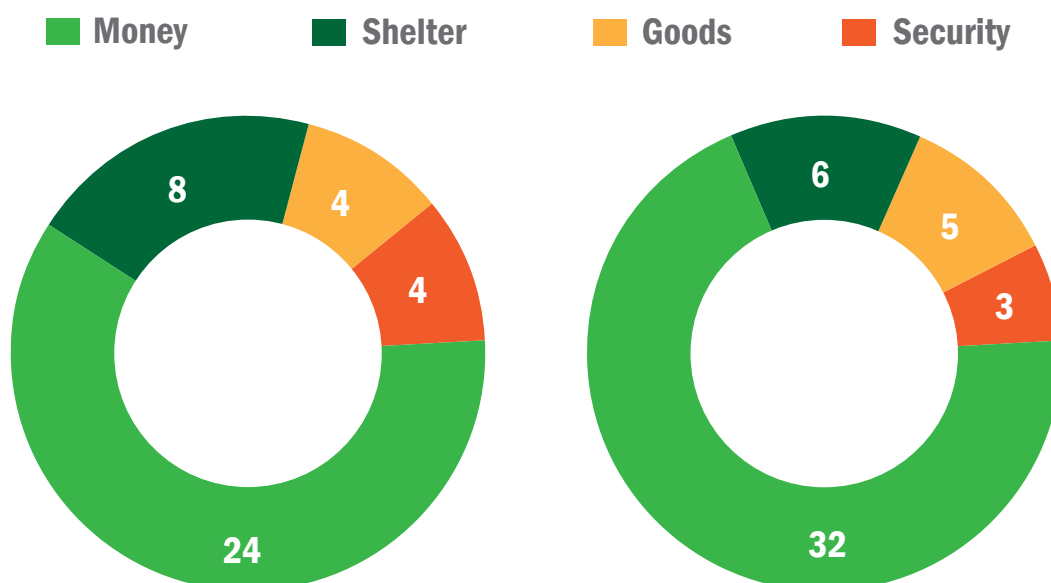


For boy clients:	For girl clients:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>12% had direct experience with boys exploited in the production of child sexual abuse material</li> <li>45% had direct experience with boys who had been groomed for sexual purposes</li> <li>10% had direct experience with boys who have been exploited through live-streaming of sexual exploitation</li> <li>17% had experience of boys that had self-created and shared sexual images or videos of themselves</li> <li>29% had experience of boys that had been trafficked for sexual purposes</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>28% had direct experience with girls exploited in the production of child sexual abuse material</li> <li>55% had direct experience with girls who had been groomed for sexual purposes</li> <li>12% had direct experience with girls who have been exploited through live-streaming of sexual exploitation</li> <li>26% had experience of girls that had self-created and shared sexual images or videos of themselves</li> <li>50% had experience of girls that had been trafficked for sexual purposes</li> </ul>

The literature review confirmed this as previous studies have shown that boys in Bolivia who live on the streets are exploited in prostitution<sup>44</sup> and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime indicated in its 2018 global trafficking report that in Bolivia, more child victims of trafficking were identified than adults (although a lack of research makes it difficult to assess the scale of trafficking for sexual purposes that affects boys).<sup>45</sup>

Unfortunately, there is very limited secondary data available on the prevalence of online child sexual exploitation within Bolivia. The most common exchange for sex was consistent between boys and girls with money, shelter, goods and security ranked in that order (see Figure 3 below).

Figure 3: What is the most common exchange made with children for sex in Bolivia?



44 ECPAT International. (2015). Situation Analysis of the Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children in Bolivia. 32.

45 UNODC. (2018). Global Report on Trafficking in Persons. 76.

## Offenders

Although the vast majority of offenders of sexual exploitation of boys are male, evidence gathered from research globally shows that women account for a small proportion of offenders.<sup>46</sup> Offenders may include both people committing abuse as well as those who facilitate the abuse. The frontline workers in Bolivia confirmed this indicating that 63% of the cases that they supported involving boys had male offenders. Workers did report that 37% of cases with boys involved female offenders (this was slightly different to the girls they worked with where 72% of cases involved male offenders and 28% involved female offenders - see Figure 4 below). The apparent high rate of female offenders exposes the global tendency to downplay the fact that women can and do offend.<sup>47</sup>

Participants also estimated that the majority of offenders were nationals (68% in the case of boy victims and 72% in the case of girls). Interestingly, even though sexual exploitation and abuse for boys is clearly apparent in Bolivia, the frontline workers acknowledged that people – including the boys themselves - think of their experiences of sexual exploitation and abuse as being less traumatic than for girls or that boys are not perceived as victims: *“In general they tend to demonstrate a positive view of the type of life they lead, in the case of being victims of exploitation, a large majority state it is a life they feel at ease with, in many cases naturalising the violence.”* (FW 57) Research in other parts of the world has shown this is particularly the case if the offender is female, despite clear evidence to the contrary.<sup>48</sup>

Figure 4: Gender and nationality of offenders of child sexual exploitation and abuse.

Cases involving boy victims		Cases involving girl victims	
Estimated % of female offenders	37%	Estimated % of female offenders	28%
Estimated % of male offenders	63%	Estimated % of male offenders	72%
Estimated % of foreign offenders	32%	Estimated % of foreign offenders	28%
Estimated % of national offenders	68%	Estimated % of national offenders	72%

The frontline workers were asked about common relationships with offenders that they witnessed (Figure 5). Parent or step-parent topped the list for both male (57%) and female offenders (33%) of boys. Other family members, siblings and family friends also scored high for both boy and

girl victims confirming that most sexual violence against children is perpetrated by someone they know. This creates particular challenges for disclosure and responses as explained by one frontline worker:

*“They tend to say – I have problems at home to do with something which happened (it’s difficult for them to mention the act). -They hurt me and my parents know, that’s why I’m here. - It’s that my uncle, brother, father, step-father, internet friend, neighbour (abuser) has started touching me, he does things he shouldn’t. - I don’t understand why I’m here, I don’t know. (and bit by bit they start explaining their story and the act).”* (FW 99)

46 Josenhans, V., Kavenagh, M., Smith, S., & Wekerle, C. (2020). Gender, rights and responsibilities: the need for a global analysis of the sexual exploitation of boys. *Child Abuse and Neglect* 110 (1).

47 Tozdan, S., Briken, P. & Dekker, A. (2019). Uncovering Female Child Sex Offenders – Needs and Challenges for Practice and Research. *Journal of Clinical Medicine*, 8(3): 401.

48 Hilton, A., Sokhem, K., Socheat, N., Syphat, O., Channy, S., Sothearwat, S., Ponarry, T., Vibol, L., & Dalin, M. (2008). *I Thought it Could Never Happen to Boys: Sexual Abuse & Exploitation of Boys in Cambodia, an Exploratory Study*. Cambodia: Social Services of Cambodia.

Figure 5: Top 5 most common offenders in the sexual abuse and exploitation of children in Bolivia

For male offenders, what is the most common relationship to the boys?	Number of responses	%	For male offenders, what is the most common relationship to the girls?	Number of responses	%
Parent/Step-parent	33	57%	Parent/Step-parent	40	69%
Family friend	21	36%	Family friend	24	41%
Other relative (over 18)	15	26%	Other relative (over 18)	22	38%
Community member (over 18)	12	21%	Community member (over 18)	11	19%
Sibling (over 18)	12	21%	Sibling (over 18)	11	19%

For female offenders, what is the most common relationship to the boys?	Number of responses	%	For female offenders, what is the most common relationship to the girls?	Number of responses	%
Parent/Step-parent	19	33%	Local Stranger (national citizen)	20	34%
Family friend	19	33%	Parent/Step-parent	17	29%
Local Stranger (national citizen)	17	29%	Family friend	17	29%
Other relative (over 18)	16	28%	Other relative (over 18)	15	26%
Community member (over 18)	10	17%	Community member (over 18)	12	21%

### The outcomes of sexual exploitation of boys

Research globally has shown that key outcomes of sexual exploitation of boys include a range of mental health concerns, substance misuse, and sexually transmitted infections;<sup>49</sup> these, and other outcomes, may lead to dropping out of school, running away from home, and legal trouble. Studies have indicated that sexually abused boys and girls have significantly more emotional problems, behavioural problems, and suicidal thoughts and attempts than their non-abused counterparts.<sup>50</sup> In addition, it seems that the experience of sexual abuse can have more severe and complex consequences for boys than for girls in respect to emotional and behavioural problems. The frontline workers perceived that female adolescents tend to engage in internalising behaviours while male adolescents engage in externalising behaviours.

The Bolivia study showed that familial abuse and dysfunction, mental health concerns and alcohol and substance misuse were common amongst boys subjected to sexual exploitation. These may manifest into further problematic coping strategies that further exacerbate impacts related to child sexual exploitation and abuse. In such

contexts, a dual target approach that considers the trauma of family abuse and neglect as well as substance misuse may be critical in identifying supports for boys (with or without a disclosure of abuse). Similarly, training frontline workers in child maltreatment more generally is important in equipping them to be able to respond and to prevent the onset of risks to sexual exploitation.

## GENDER NORMS AND GENDERED ASPECTS OF SEXUAL EXPLOITATION OF BOYS

Gender norms and the associated concepts of patriarchy, masculinity and gender-based violence, are normally associated with the sexual violence of women and girls - the largest proportion of victims of sexual violence globally.<sup>51</sup> However, these norms establish and maintain hierarchies of power and patriarchy both between and within genders.<sup>52</sup> Whilst male perpetration may be seen as interpreting male identities, especially in societies where machoism is a dominant feature, its flip side is that gender norms around masculinity and victimisation make

49 ECPAT International (2021). *A Global Review of Existing Literature on the Sexual Exploitation of Boys*. Bangkok: ECPAT International.

50 *Ibid.*

51 Dalby, J., Hart, R. and Russell, W. (2017). *Childhood sexual abuse of boys as gender-based violence*. Academic Letters.

52 Connell, R.W. (2005) *Masculinities* (second edition). University of California Press.

boys particularly reluctant to disclose sexual violence for fear of being seen as weak. These gendered aspects of sexual exploitation and abuse of boys are important as they often reflect gendered biases both from society and that boys have internalised themselves.

## Masculinities

Gender norms relating to masculinity and patriarchy are strong in many Latin American countries, whereby boys are expected to be stoic, brave and not show signs of weakness: *“Currently there are still male chauvinistic beliefs that males are strong and can deal with anything.”* (FW 110) Such patriarchal assumptions define the gender norms that frame the awareness and response to the sexual exploitation of boys: *“In our context it is still very difficult to work with males due to the male chauvinism that exists that does not recognise males as a victim.”* (FW 61) Attitudes like these can lead to issues such as a disbelief that boys can be sexually exploited by women (yet the Bolivian workers estimated that 37% of their boy cases involved female offenders) or fear by boys of being perceived as homosexual.

These gendered aspects to child sexual exploitation and abuse of boys can limit their ability to express feelings of abuse and vulnerability as boys are socialised to comply with expectations of masculine behaviour and to disguise negative emotional responses. This of course means that the sexual exploitation of boys remains more hidden and less visible to potential help:

*“When males try to access support services for medical and legal issues, they are stigmatised and reduced emotionally. In our profession it has been observed that there are few cases (of boys) who access therapy because of the concepts meaning they are ‘weak’ or lacking in ‘manhood’.”* (FW 111)

Boys in Bolivia are also subjected to masculine expectations of independence whereby boys are afforded a greater deal of unsupervised freedom

in comparison to girls which paradoxically can contribute towards their vulnerability. For example, the sense that girls require protection more than boys means that: *“they leave aside the risk boys are exposed to even though the abuse is not visible among them.”* (FW 12)

This can be particularly problematic for young of diverse sexual orientation, as they fall outside the accepted gender norms. They often feel they have little choice but to accept or adapt to exploitative experiences via expected behavioural scripts that can lead to family and community rejection: *“their friends don’t understand them, they alienate themselves and explore [their sexuality] further.”* (FW 102) and *“with adolescents, who due to their gender are not accepted by their family creating rupture; they end up in the streets and are often victims of sexual violence...”* (FW 106) In societies where ‘machismo’ is dominant, abusers may justify sexual victimisation of young people of different sexual orientation on the grounds that ‘they like it’.<sup>53</sup>

Most frontline workers identified awareness raising strategies as the best approach for tackling harmful gender norms. In particular, *“Workshops on the deconstruction of masculinity during which different stereotype issues are discussed.”* (FW 81) and *“talks, workshops on raising awareness about taboos and stigmas and what it means to be man, with the parents and their children.”* (FW 92) The proposed target audience was usually parents and carers: *“Prevention of sexual and gender violence through psycho-educational workshops for parents and caretakers. Sexual guidance for parents and caretakers. Guidance on the deconstruction of gender role.”* (FW 96) Nevertheless, frontline workers generally failed to identify a broader range of strategies (beyond ‘workshops’) that could be used to help with a “deconstruction of masculinity” (FW 119) such as has been used in other contexts within the region like mass media campaigns or serviced-based programmes targeting men and boys.<sup>54</sup> As such, one frontline worker suggested *“work should be done on gaining visibility for cases of boys and male adolescents regarding sexual violence and commercial sexual exploitation.”* (FW 116)

The relationship between gender norms,

53 ECPAT International. (2013). [Examining neglected elements in combatting sexual exploitation of children.](#)

54 World Health Organization (2007). [Engaging men and boys in changing gender-based inequity in health: Evidence from programme interventions.](#) Geneva: WHO.

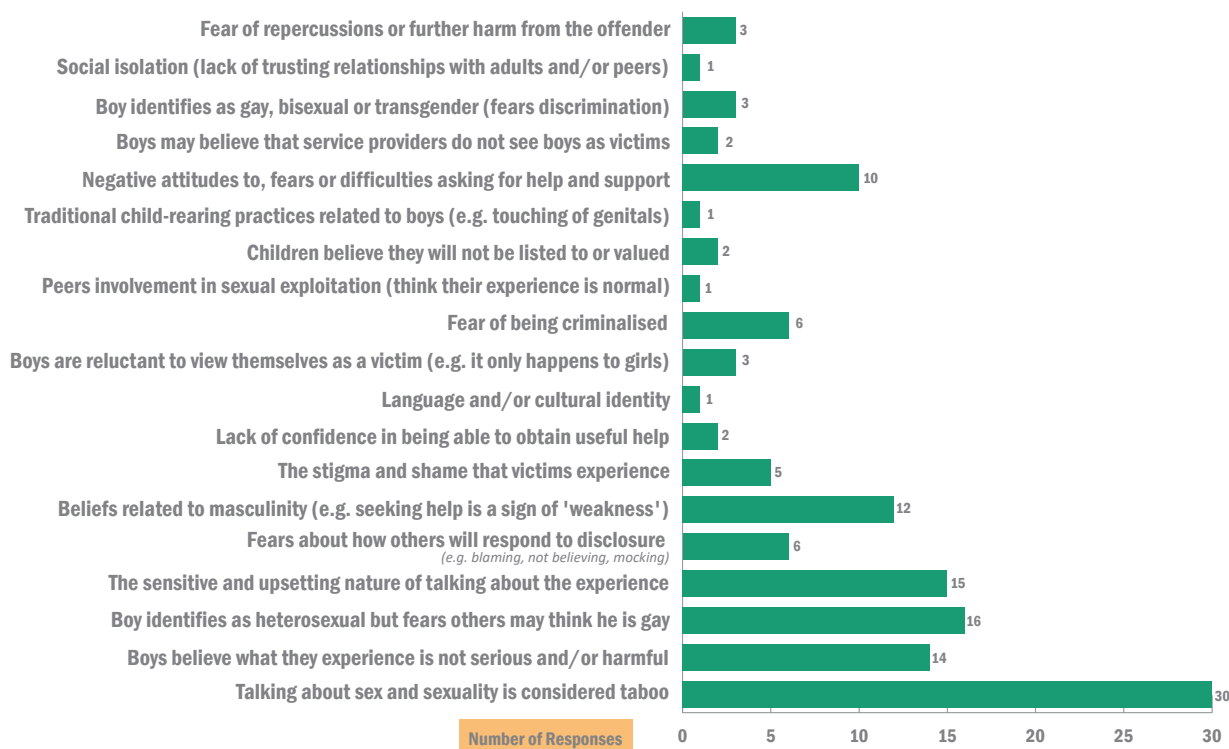
masculinities and sexual exploitation for boys is complex. More attention must be paid to better understand these connections and to the gendered consequences of being exploited and the negative effects it has on disclosure and seeking assistance.<sup>55</sup>

## Barriers to Boys Disclosing or Reporting

As discussed in the section above, gender norms have been found globally to set significant barriers to boys subjected to sexual exploitation disclosing with boys commonly less likely than girls to reveal their experience.<sup>56</sup> Perceived negative consequences and responses to disclosure including guilt, self-blame, shame or a sense of personal responsibility for the abuse are commonly identified by boys.<sup>57</sup> Even when they need help they may not disclose at first. As one frontline worker explained: *“The cases are identified when street children mention they are sick and when they are taken to the hospital we are told they have a sexually transmitted infection.”* (FW 21)

Frontline support workers in Bolivia were asked to identify their top three barriers to boys’ disclosures from a list developed from the research literature. Figure 6 below shows that many responses were focused around social and gender norms surrounding masculinity, sex and sexuality and stigmatisation related to being a victim of sexual violence: *“fear and shame often impede these cases from being revealed.”* (FW 83) Fifty-two percent identified ‘Talking about sex and sexuality is considered taboo’ as a top barrier that keeps boys silent about their experiences of sexual exploitation and abuse. Twenty-eight percent highlighted ‘boy identifies as heterosexual but fears others may think he is gay’ which links to the highly gendered social norms found in Bolivia as 21% emphasised the concern of ‘beliefs related to masculinity’ as a barrier. As such, 24% noted that ‘boys believe that what they experience is not serious and/or harmful’.

Figure 6: Barriers for boys to disclose sexual exploitation.



55 UNICEF (2020). *Research on the Sexual Exploitation of Boys: Findings, ethical considerations and methodological challenges*. UNICEF: New York.

56 For example, in a study in the UK, girls were four times more likely to disclose sexual exploitation than boys. See: Cockbain E., Ashby, M., & Brayley, H. (2017). *Immaterial boys? A large-scale exploration of gender-based differences in child sexual exploitation service users*. *Sexual Abuse*, 29(7): 658-684.

57 Lemaigre, C., Taylor, E & Gittos, C. (2017). *Barriers and facilitators to disclosing sexual abuse in childhood and adolescence: A systematic review*. *Child Abuse and Neglect*, 70: 39-52.



These experiences of boy victims are clearly reflected in the frontline workers' responses on how to address barriers to disclosure. In addressing the gender sensitivities involved, one frontline worker suggested:

*“Rely on staff specialised in attending male victims of sexual violence. For example, it helps if we can rely on males in care teams, especially in the cases of male victims of sexual crimes so that the victims build trust with people of the same gender.” (FW 26)*

Many of the frontline workers recognised the priority of tackling the problem of ‘self-blame’: *“let the children know that they are not to blame for what happened to them, more on the contrary that they are victims and that the abusers must pay for these crimes.”* (FW 56) and *“making them aware that both males and women have the same rights and opportunities to disclose what really happens to them.”* (FW 43) In particular:

*“Try to bust the myths about commercial sexual violence, like the myth that only girls can be victims, explaining to boys that this crime does not discriminate, but in any of the cases, the adult is to blame and not the boy or girl.” (FW 81)*

Gender assumptions about offenders can also lead to less likely reporting when females offend and males are victimised.<sup>58</sup>

## THE LACK OF SPECIFIC AND TAILORED MEASURES TO PREVENT AND PROTECT BOYS FROM SEXUAL EXPLOITATION

Although all children may be affected by sexual exploitation, research has tended to focus heavily on girls, due to the perception that girls tend to be more vulnerable to sexual exploitation.<sup>59</sup> However, from this study, it is clear that male victims of sexual exploitation are prevalent in Bolivia. Such abuse can have many harmful and specific psychological effects. As boys can struggle to acknowledge and disclose the exploitation they are experiencing, they also struggle to find appropriate services that can help them. It is with these barriers in mind that this section also looks at how boys are afforded protection within the legal system of Bolivia.

### Awareness of the problem

For the timely and effective response to the sexual exploitation of boys, it is important that the professionals and institutions that work to protect them (healthcare professionals, social care professionals, teachers, law enforcement officers, the judiciary etc.) understand and are aware of the scale and scope of the problem. One respondent for the study stated that *“In Bolivia, there is no study which identifies boys caught in this problem.”* (FW 21) A common perception found from this research was that these professionals often perceived that boys did not require the same level of support services as girls. These views can also manifest through policy and practice. A commonly heard view from the survey was that *“there is prejudice that boys are strong and shouldn't complain and should accept...”* (FW 97) Another noted:

58 Tozdan, S., Briken, P. & Dekker, A. (2019). *Uncovering Female Child Sex Offenders – Needs and Challenges for Practice and Research*. *Journal of Clinical Medicine*, 8(3): 401.

59 Greenbaum, J., Crawford-Jakubiak, J. E., & Committee on Child Abuse & Neglect. (2015). *“Child sex trafficking and commercial sexual exploitation: Health care needs of victims.”* *Pediatrics*, 135(3), 566–574.

*“In the cases of boys and male adolescents, care is practically absent since the Social and Municipal Service Departments prioritise women and girls as they suppose the boy can tolerate anything...” (FW 56)*

In part, this is hindered by the fact that boys are often referred to social services for other issues such as running away from home, substance abuse or gang violence which masks other more complex experiences: *“The majority of the adolescent [boys] identify and request help with schooling and food due to the existence of violence in their families.”* (FW 40) As such, frontline workers may struggle to even identify boys who are subjected to sexual exploitation at all, feeding into the perception that it is less of a problem: *“In the beginning they tend to lie until they gain trust...”* (FW 80)

Unfortunately, the responses of some frontline workers demonstrated unsubstantiated assumptions that boys are less negatively affected by sexual exploitation, or are quicker to recover. These views can result in professionals and institutions not providing the necessary tailored services to boys, or worse still, an ambivalence to the needs of boys. One respondent lamented that *“No, the care is given to those children and adolescents who have already acknowledged their exploitation.”* (FW 21) whereas another recognised that *“the authorities won’t give credit to the act of abuse towards the male gender.”* (FW 37)

This lack of awareness of the scale and scope of sexual exploitation and abuse of boys can lead to a significant paucity of services and resources for boys. As such, support services for boys are often not very visible, are lacking or are even de-prioritised: *“...it is difficult for them to access to care so they prefer to keep quiet or ignore the problem. As an institution, we are skilled to attend to the female population...”* (FW 60) One frontline worker recognised the dangers of this:

*“Concerning the sexual exploitation of males, it is not given visibility. This may be due to structural patterns which do not allow the victims to access the care and protection services. There is even a lack of knowledge of these since the fight against violence towards women is given more visibility. It gives the false impression that the services are only for women. Even if the town where I work has not presented cases of male sexual exploitation so far, it doesn’t mean it doesn’t exist.”* (FW 26)

The lack of services for boys can lead to less appropriate and potentially punitive responses to boys rather than the necessary specialised psychosocial and legal support that they need: *“the lack of recognition of them as victims... Justice is insensitive to the male population and criminalises the victims.”* (FW 73)

### **Gaps in the legal frameworks and enforcement**

Whilst legislators and law enforcement are in agreement of the need for a robust legal framework to tackle the problem of sexual exploitation of children, the power of the legal framework can easily become lost within loopholes or the understanding and consciousness of those tasked with protecting children. One of the biggest challenges exposed through this research was how to balance protection with age-appropriate freedom for consensual activity. One difficulty here focuses on the age of sexual consent (statutory rape) which is set at 14 under the Bolivian Criminal Code, with violation of this law carrying a penalty of between 15 and 20 years of imprisonment.<sup>60</sup> Whilst a close in age exemption clause exists (whereby if a child over 12 years old has consensual sex, free of violence or intimidation, with another child no more than 3 years older)<sup>61</sup> the age of sexual consent at 14 (which therefore permits sex between anyone above this age, including adults) is very low. This can make it difficult for professionals to identify sexual abuse and for police to prosecute adults who sexually exploit

60 Plurinational State of Bolivia. (1997). *Código Penal (as amended in 2017)*. Article 309.

61 *Ibid.*

children. One frontline worker noted that: *“In many cases if these boys (or girls) have a romantic relationship with their exploiter, they hide it.”* (FW 57) Children’s sexual agency and consent was further illustrated when frontline workers were given hypothetical scenarios about sexual exploitation and were asked how they would support the children depicted. For example, in the case of ‘Jani’ who has sex with men he describes as his boyfriends (he accepts money and gifts from them) one frontline worker did not identify it as sexual exploitation:

***“In the present case, it does not refer to somebody who is led to being a victim through deception, intimidation, abuse of power, use of force, or any other type of coercion, threats, abuse in situations of vulnerability which make the victim dependent, or also through the provision or reception of payments.” (FW 56)***

The issue of children’s agency also occurs in relation to the minimum working age which is also set at 14 in Bolivia.<sup>62</sup> Whilst child labour in Bolivia has been decreasing throughout the past decade, the National Statistics Institution estimated that 739,000 children between the ages of 5-17 carried out some type of labour activity in 2016.<sup>63</sup> This is particularly worrying given that the prevalence of child labour in the country has been identified as a factor that has contributed to the sexual exploitation of children.<sup>64</sup> Poverty and social exclusion are among the main causes of child labour in Bolivia and children can be exposed to a range of exploitative work and thus child trafficking. Whilst human trafficking is criminalised under Article 281 of the Criminal Code<sup>65</sup> the law applies generally and is not specific for trafficking crimes against children. Whilst the legislation provides a definition of trafficking that is largely in line with the United Nations Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children supplementing the UN convention against Transnational Organised

Crime (UN Trafficking Protocol),<sup>66</sup> the fact that children are only considered under ‘aggravated penalties’ means that it is not explicitly stated that the trafficking of children does not require one of the means of trafficking provided, i.e. “deception, intimidation, force, coercion” etc, in order to constitute an offence. This is in direct contradiction of Article 3(c) of the UN Trafficking Protocol and may leave children vulnerable to exploitation by trafficking, including sexual exploitation.

As previously mentioned, 12% of the frontline workers have directly provided support to boys who have been exploited through the production of child sexual abuse material with 17% having experience of boys having self-created and shared sexual images or videos of themselves. Although the Bolivian legislation contains some offences which may offer children protection from online sexual exploitation, it is not fully in line with international law and major gaps remain. For example, children are only included under the aggravated penalties rather than under a separate child-focused offence. This means that there is no clarification that a child’s ‘consent’ will not mitigate the criminal liability of an offender and thereby preventing an interpretation that the child permitted their own exploitation. Similarly, there are no provisions in the Bolivian legislation which exclude a child’s criminal liability for producing and sharing self-generated sexual content especially when compelled to do so because they are in an abusive or exploitative situation. The lack of such a clause may result in children being treated by the law as offenders – creators of child sexual abuse material, even when voluntarily exchanged between peers.

There are numerous other limitations in the Bolivian legislation regarding online child sexual exploitation, such as failing to properly separate offences relating to pornography in general from child sexual abuse material. There are no provisions under the Bolivian legislation that explicitly criminalise the conducts of downloading or knowingly obtaining access to child sexual abuse material; in fact, 36% of frontline workers in this study did not believe that viewing child

62 *Ibid.*, Article 129.

63 Instituto Nacional de Estadística. (2018). *El Trabajo Infantil de las Niñas, Niños y Adolescentes Se Reduce.*

64 E Zabala Torres and A Ramírez Quiroga. (2016). *Dinámicas de la trata, proxenetismo y violencia sexual comercial de niñas, niños y adolescentes en Bolivia.* 17.

65 Plurinational State of Bolivia. (2012). *Ley N° 263, Integral Contra la Trata y Tráfico de Personas.* Article 281 Bis.

66 Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime. (2000).

sexual abuse material was problematic. There is no explicit obligation or procedure for Internet service providers to filter, block or report instances of child sexual abuse material that has been encountered on their servers. A frontline worker for this study highlighted the negligence of the social media service providers: *“Both the [internet service] provider and the consumer are committing the crime of commercial sexual exploitation.”* (FW 129) Further, the Bolivian legal framework is silent on the issue of online grooming, potentially allowing offenders to act with impunity and leaving children exposed to increased risk in the online environment. Given the ever-evolving technological nature of crimes relating to online child sexual exploitation and the evidence worldwide of the impact on boys,<sup>67</sup> it is of the utmost importance that national legislation is updated to consider these newer offences.

Finally, it is also worth mentioning that statutory limitations for the prosecution of child sexual exploitation crimes exist in Bolivia. In Bolivia, the Criminal Procedure Code prescribes that these limitation periods will amount to 8 years for crimes with a punishment of 6 or more years imprisonment, as is the case for all crimes related to child sexual exploitation prescribed under the Bolivian legislation.<sup>68</sup> For sexual crimes against

children, these limitation periods will begin 4 years after the child reaches the age of majority.<sup>69</sup>

However, research shows that when sexually exploited children do disclose their abuse, their disclosure is often significantly delayed, especially in the case of boys.<sup>70</sup> As one frontline worker mentioned: *“Due to their culture, boys are taught not to tell if anything is wrong; they should be men.”* (FW 40) In fact, research globally has shown that on average, boys may disclose sexual abuse periods four times longer than girls due to stigma, shame and cultural issues around masculinity.<sup>71</sup> In these cases, boys’ access to justice can be thwarted by short statutes of limitations for sexual offences. Therefore, it is recommended that there is no statute of limitation for crimes related to child sexual exploitation and abuse, allowing victims to come forward if and when they feel sufficiently safe and empowered to do so.

Capacity building around awareness of the different laws in Bolivia that can protect boys from sexual exploitation is also essential. During the frontline worker survey, it was seen that professionals are not clear on how even the existing legal framework can be used as shown in Figure 7.

Figure 7: Workers' knowledge of legislation

Does Bolivia establish an age of sexual consent (statutory rape) for boys below 18?	Yes	21	40%
	No	27	52%
	I don't know	4	8%
Does legislation establish a close-in-age exemption to avoid criminalisation of peer-to-peer consensual sexual relationship?	Yes	23	44%
	No	14	27%
	I don't know	15	29%
Is it specifically defined in law in Bolivia that it is a criminal offence to engage a boy below 18 in sexual activities for money?	Yes	40	78%
	No	9	18%
	I don't know	2	4%
Is merely possessing child sexual abuse material with no intent to distribute/share criminalised?	Yes	41	80%
	No	7	14%
	I don't know	3	6%
Does Bolivian legislation explicitly state that a child victim can never consent to be trafficked?	Yes	39	76%
	No	6	12%
	I don't know	6	12%

67 ECPAT International. (2021). *A global review of existing literature on the sexual exploitation of boys*. Bangkok: ECPAT International.

68 Plurinational State of Bolivia. (1970). *Código de Procedimiento Penal*. Article 29.

69 Plurinational State of Bolivia. (2019). *Ley de Abreviación Procesal Penal y de Fortalecimiento de la Lucha Integral Contra la Violencia a Niñas, Niños, Adolescentes y Mujeres*.

70 ECPAT International. (2017). *“Through the Eyes of the Child: Barriers to Access to Justice and Remedies for Child Victims of Sexual Exploitation ECPAT International”*. (2017), 58.

71 Josenhans, V., Kavenagh, M., Smith, S., & Wekerle, C. (2020). *Gender, rights and responsibilities: the need for a global analysis of the sexual exploitation of boys*. *Child Abuse and Neglect* 110 (1).



## Access to Recovery and Reintegration

Under the Child and Adolescent Code it is provided that children who are victims and witnesses of crime will be provided with specialised, respectful and confidential treatment with the assistance of a multidisciplinary team and taking into consideration all relevant protocols to avoid revictimisation.<sup>72</sup> The Child and Adolescent Code also states a number of protection measures for children, such as psychological treatment or inclusion in a state care facility.<sup>73</sup> Similar measures relating to a child's right to access recovery and reintegration measures can be found under the Law no. 263 Against Human Trafficking.<sup>74</sup>

In Bolivia, 'Centro Especializado de Prevención y Atención Terapéutica' centres provide therapy and, where necessary, support throughout judicial processes, for child victims of sexual violence.<sup>75</sup> However, whilst nine of these centres existed throughout Bolivia as of 2021, the only one that reportedly works effectively is located in the city of Santa Cruz, with the other eight, located in each municipal capital of Bolivia, having inadequate

infrastructure and insufficient staff to provide the necessary services.<sup>76</sup> In 2019, the Office of the Ombudsman called upon departments and municipalities to strengthen both these centres and Child Defence Offices so as to enable them to provide sustained therapeutic care to child victims.<sup>77</sup>

The frontline support workers reached through this study reflected this geographical constraint as 98% of sampled frontline service providers worked in urban areas (46 of them based in La Paz and 13% in Santa Cruz), whilst 10% worked in rural areas and 9% identified as working in both urban and rural locations. These support workers provided a range of services that largely fell into the following categories:

- Physical and mental health support: Such as one-on-one counselling (57%), sexual health advice (38%), group psychosocial support (57%), medical care and treatment (28%) and LGBT specific support (7%).
- Socio-economic support: Legal support (28%), basic supplies such as food and clothing (38%), economic assistance, cash transfers (7%) and reintegration support (59%).
- Family support and accommodation: Support for families and caregivers (29%), residential care and semi-independent supported housing (64%).
- Support to access education: high school (48%), tertiary studies (14%), non-formal education (22%).

Overall, participants estimated that 41% of their caseloads were boys and of these, approximately 31% were referred having had experience of sexual exploitation. 5% of those boys were victimised before the age 5 and 25% between the ages of 5 and 10. The most common age of exploitation was between 11-15 years (44%), with 30% having been exploited at 16-17 years. These figures were not statistically different to those of cases involving girls, illustrating the importance of making sure that there is equal access to recovery and reintegration services for all children. This is not always the case in Bolivia as in relation to reception centres for victims of trafficking and associated crimes (as detailed under the Law no. 263 Against Human Trafficking),<sup>78</sup> there are 3 centres that are specialised for girl and women victims<sup>79</sup> and no reception centres that offer specialised care for boys subjected to trafficking and related crimes.<sup>80</sup> Indeed, in such circumstances boys are brought to state facilities that cater for abandoned children or children in conflict with the law, whose care is not tailored suitably for victims of child sexual exploitation and abuse.<sup>81</sup> For example, it was reported that in the case of boys *"the majority have problems*

72 Plurinational State of Bolivia. (2018). *Ley 548 Código Niña, Niño y Adolescente*. Article 154.

73 *Ibid.*, Article 169.

74 Plurinational State of Bolivia. (2012). *Ley Nº 263, Integral Contra la Trata y Tráfico de Personas*. Article 31.

75 UNICEF. (2018). CEPAT: Centro Especializado de Prevención y Atención Terapéutica.

76 ECPAT Consorcio. (2021). Personal communication.

77 Plurinational State of Bolivia. (2019). *Acciones Conjuntas y Fortalecidas para Luchar Contra la Violencia Sexual Hacia Niñas, Niños y Adolescentes*.

78 Plurinational State of Bolivia. (2012). *Ley Nº 263, Integral Contra la Trata y Tráfico de Personas*. Article 31

79 ECPAT Consorcio. (2021). Personal communication.

80 *Ibid.*

81 *Ibid.*



from sexually transmitted infections” (FW 21) or health problems related to “the effects of anal penetration.” (FW 92) However, 48% of the frontline workers assessed the availability and quality of medical services for boys to be poor and 37% rated it as fair (17% felt the availability of medical support services for boys was ‘good’). Similar figures were given for the quality of legal assistance (65% poor; 33% fair) and the quality of reintegration services such as planning support for families was rated as poor by 66% and fair by 32%.

Frontline workers were asked to reflect on why the quality of services for boys was considered so low in Bolivia. Most commonly, lack of staff, lack of training/skills and insufficient budget were cited. Bureaucracy and corruption were also concerns often mentioned. These can manifest in different ways including “difficulties in the interpretation of the law.” (FW 97) Several indicated that due to various gender-based perceptions (see earlier section) boys were not considered a concern in relation to the need for recovery and reintegration services:

***“In general it is due to a demand for care which oversteps the skills of the staff not necessarily trained in trafficking and quality approaches. Meanwhile, there is a general bias in the criteria for prioritising girls and women. The shelters are not in the conditions to attend boys and men in vulnerable situations.” (FW 56)***

Suggested responses for overcoming these accessibility and quality constraints largely focused on institutional reform and raised awareness of how boys are affected by sexual exploitation. One respondent summed it up by saying “Strengthen the level of inter-institutional coordination with state and private institutions. Work on the diffusion and definition of sexual exploitation of boys to raise awareness.” (FW 12) Many mentioned the need for the allocation of greater resources, increased budgets, more committed stakeholders and capacity building of professionals (including in the rural areas). In short: “They need psychological help, reintegration - not revictimisation – and help from the State with health care, education and the recovery of their life plans. There is no commitment in many of the state foster homes.” (FW 38); or as another explained “the Independent Government Departments need to create Specialised Safe Homes which consider the conditions needed to attend male victims by providing them with different treatment according to their specific needs.” (FW 56)

# CONCLUSION

Despite the awareness of sexual exploitation of children in Bolivia, the sexual exploitation of boys is largely overlooked and so little is known about their vulnerabilities, experiences and support needs. The purpose of this study was to build an empirical base for better understanding of the sexual exploitation of boys. Through a survey of frontline support workers, as well as a literature review of secondary data and legal analysis, a picture has emerged of the lived experiences of boys subjected to sexual exploitation. The frontline workers survey explored their professional views on identifying the factors that lead to child sexual exploitation and abuse involving males (including comparing these with cases involving females); their understanding of perpetration and victimisation processes; and the nature of existing services for boys.

While this study represents an important contribution to the limited knowledge of sexual exploitation of boys in Bolivia the emerging evidence base remains underdeveloped and complex. However, four key themes emerged:

## *Hidden and Neglected Vulnerabilities*

The responses of the frontline worker survey showed that if they had contact with boys, it was most likely to occur due to behavioural difficulties of the boys or via the criminal justice system. As such, frontline workers do not always initially recognise the signs of sexual exploitation in boys as there are a number of gender norms creating assumptions and stereotypes that keeps sexual exploitation and abuse of boys hidden. Sex and sexuality is seen as a taboo subject in Bolivia and not readily discussed. Boys subjected to sexual violence can easily face stigma and shame, they do not want to talk about their experiences and so often do not disclose. Social constructs tend to view boys as strong and independent and 'can look after themselves' so signs are often missed or boys are not perceived to be victims.

Furthermore, unconscious bias can lead to vulnerabilities to sexual exploitation being overlooked in boys. Poverty and family violence were main factors identified that may cause boys to leave home and becoming homeless or to be working on the street. All these factors can make boys more vulnerable to sexual exploitation, despite the perception that boys can 'look after themselves'. Young people of diverse sexual orientation and diverse gender identity are especially at risk as they may be exploring their sexuality and identity in ways that increase risks of exploitation due to discrimination. In short, the professionals interviewed identified varied perceptions of the risk factors in relation to boys suggesting the need to look at interlocking vulnerabilities. This highlights a significant area for further research directly with boys themselves to better understand the synthesis of these complex and interrelated vulnerabilities and design tailored preventions and responses.

## *Boys' Lived Experiences*

Where an exchange for sex has been involved, boys – and those meant to protect them – may perceive the circumstances through a lens of boys exhibiting agency and choice. This contrasts the way the same experiences would be viewed in relation to girls. Due to various grooming and entrapment strategies used by offenders, boys can sometimes internalise similar perceptions of their engagement in sexual exploitation. Whilst the largest proportion of sexual exploitation involves male offenders, this study, and limited other research is indicating that females are also involved, perhaps at higher rates than commonly expected (37%). Abuse by women is even less likely to be seen as exploitation and can be internalised with admiration from peers and acceptance from professionals as a masculine norm.<sup>82</sup>

82 NPCC and Victim Support. (2018). *Boys and Young Men at Risk of Sexual Exploitation*. The Children's Society, UK.

The health effects of victimisation are significant and can manifest in both behavioural and physical outcomes. Boys subjected to sexual exploitation may also experience mental health issues, substance misuse, anger and violent or antisocial behaviour; this can easily result in them being perceived by helpers as aggressive and unruly, masking their victimisation. The physical trauma can result in injuries, infections.

### **Gender Norms and Gendered Aspects**

Gender stereotypes and masculinities the world over tend to create the assumption that males do not experience sexual exploitation and that boys should not talk about their feelings or experiences of victimhood.<sup>83</sup> Males who express emotion and vulnerability within the context of hegemonic and toxic masculinity are believed to be showing weakness; instead men and boys are expected to be fearless, stoic and virile. Being victims of sexual violence is the antithesis of the norms of masculinities. The frontline workers in Bolivia noted that there is the fear among boys that being victimised will be viewed as a weakness and that the masculine response is that they should be brave, a further inhibitor to disclosing. They may also fear being labelled as gay or experience homophobia.

These factors have a huge impact on how sexually assaulted males see themselves as gendered and sexual beings.<sup>84</sup> Gendered and masculinity norms also generate self-blame which further discourages help-seeking or disclosure. In the case of female offenders, gender norms can lead them to interpret their victimisation as 'sexual experience' and the journey into manhood as opposed to sexual assault.

### **Lack of Specific and Tailored Measures**

As this study shows, prevailing notions of masculinity and gendered social norms result in weak responses by service providers who are unable to recognise or do not have the skills and resources to protect boys. In Bolivia, there is a clear lack of support services available for boys

both in diversity and geographical spread (i.e. urban versus rural) and what services are available they are likely to be female-centric. In part, this is due to the wrongful assumptions and misunderstandings within relevant professionals that boys cannot be sexually exploited.

Awareness-raising of the vulnerabilities to boys is therefore critical to primary prevention. Child protection systems need to be better equipped to meet the needs of boys affected by sexual exploitation and abuse.

Whilst Bolivian legislation does not discriminate between boys and girls within its criminal or procedural legislation, a number of gaps remain. Further resources, infrastructure and technical training of all personnel responsible for children's well-being (e.g. teachers, social workers, health professionals, law enforcement officials) is necessary in order to ensure that all boys subjected to sexual exploitation receive the protection and care that Bolivian policy and legislation establishes. Gender specific services are more likely to be effective in supporting healing and recovery of boys subjected to sexual exploitation.

To conclude, this study has highlighted the experiences of frontline workers in responding to sexual exploitation of children. It highlights how and why boys are at particular risk and the varied ways that boys with different interlocking vulnerabilities will experience and be affected by sexual exploitation and abuse. It is evident that more needs to be done to consider the gendered and social norms that affects boys' protection from, or vulnerability to, sexual exploitation. More in-depth primary research, particularly with boys themselves, is needed to recognise these issues and to better identify the care, treatment and support needs of these boys. This research highlights the needs for all duty-bearers in Bolivia to consider how stereotypes around masculinities and gender norms have affected the targeting of resources and services when it comes to strategies to prevent and respond to sexual exploitation of boys.

83 Chynoweth, S., Buscher, D., Martin, S. & Zwi, A. (2020). Characteristics and Impacts of Sexual Violence Against Men and Boys in Conflict and Displacement: A Multi-country Exploratory Study. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*. doi: 10.1177/0886260520967132.

84 Petersson, C. and Plantin, L. (2019). *Breaking with Norms of Masculinity: Men Making Sense of Their Experience of Sexual Assault*. *Clinical Social Work Journal* 47: 372-383.

# RECOMMENDATIONS

## LEARNING 1:

*Hidden and neglected vulnerabilities may make some boys especially vulnerable to sexual exploitation and abuse.*

- Carry out comprehensive learning needs assessments with a range of service providers (social, community workers, medical, legal professionals etc.) and develop a learning curriculum, essential elements of which can be incorporated into existing orientation, training and continued professional development. Existing resources exist and may be easily adapted.<sup>85</sup>
- Establish a child protection community of practice (locally and nationally), to share experience, knowledge and develop guidance, strategy, learning, and practice related to the sexual exploitation and abuse of boys across the workforce of child protection practitioners.
- Develop parenting programmes to create awareness of child sexual exploitation and abuse and boys' vulnerability. Provide support to parents in order to be able to discuss with their children without shame or apprehension.
- When boys do not know about sex and the risks of sexual exploitation and abuse, it enables offenders to take advantage. Ensure knowledge reaches all children including information about sex, sexuality, consent, personal boundaries, what adults and others around them can and cannot do. Take time to listen and talk with boys about sexual exploitation and abuse.
- Discriminatory attitudes remain regarding young people of diverse sexual orientation and diverse gender identity, and the intersections with child sexual exploitation and abuse. This can prevent children who are subjected to sexual exploitation from disclosing and seeking help. Work to reduce these attitudes must be increased. Partner with specialist diverse SOGIE organisations where possible.
- Children with disabilities are rarely recognised as vulnerable to sexual exploitation. Develop initiatives to improve public awareness of the risks for children with disabilities, and train and promote closer collaboration between people working with children and sexual exploitation and disability experts.

## LEARNING 2:

*There are critical gaps in data and knowledge about the scale and scope of sexual exploitation of boys in Bolivia.*

- Prioritise research and gathering of primary data that highlights the experiences and perspectives of boys involved in sexual exploitation. Qualitative, gender inclusive research may be especially helpful within this context to explore their lived experiences, the help-seeking process, their expressed needs and ideas about how and what type of services and support should be available. Make this information publicly available.

85 Down to Zero. (2020). *Bridging the Gap: A toolkit for supporting boys affected by sexual exploitation and abuse.*

- Research needs specifically identified from this study include but not be limited to:
  - Examination of particular contexts where boys are vulnerable (i.e. labour, migration, street living, travel and tourism, residential institutions including religious institutions);
  - Exploring how gender norms are experienced by boys and contribute to their framing of sexual exploitation vulnerability and responses;
  - Productive help-seeking behaviours of boys and their psychosocial, mental, and physical health needs;
- Studies need to be inclusive of and directed at boys from disadvantaged groups, including ethnic minorities and children with disabilities and identify specific protective needs for such groups. Studies should directly engage children as participants whose voices, experiences and ideas are valued and used to shape recommendations for future policy and programme development.
- Data collection and monitoring for child protection should be significantly improved. This includes the development and implementation of systematic, disaggregated national data collection, including databases, baseline studies and progress indicators.
- Develop and implement mechanisms to evaluate the effectiveness of awareness-raising and prevention operations.

### LEARNING 3:

#### *Gender norms contribute to the vulnerability of boys and inhibit them being perceived as victims of sexual exploitation and abuse.*

- Critically reflect on gender norms and gendered aspects (such as masculinities, patriarchy and chauvinism). Parents and carers should fully accept and normalise the fact that boys are vulnerable to sexual exploitation and abuse, they can be victims, and need adequate protection and support. Such support should be accessible without blame and provided in a non-judgemental way.
- Build up the comfort and confidence of social support workers to recognise the signs of child sexual exploitation and abuse, to be able to discuss sexual exploitation with boys and on how to respond, protect and support them appropriately. Provide resources and embed essential learning on the sexual exploitation of boys within existing professional training and orientation materials.
- Dismantle discomfort around discussions on sex, sexuality and traditional social norms that may be harmful amongst caregivers, support workers and other adults who come into contact with children (such as teachers at schools to better allow discussions and to facilitate disclosures).
- Listen and engage with boys about their worries and experiences, and how they view gender norms that have an impact on their lives. ECPAT International's [Survivor Conversations](#) approach in research and consultation can be used to talk with boys and develop responses addressing their vulnerability.
- Government must develop targeted awareness campaigns that challenges toxic masculinities and reframes the notion that boys seeking help and support is a sign of weakness. Instead, campaigns can be aimed at children that normalise and reward help-seeking behaviours for all children.



## LEARNING 4:

*There is a lack of specific and tailored measures that are male sensitive and inclusive of appropriate child protection responses.*

- Needs assessments and capacity building of frontline workers along with evaluation of existing services are required and should be prioritised, to contribute to the development of inclusive, gender- and trauma- informed skills for practitioners.
- Invest in prevention programmes to address the root causes and multiple vulnerabilities that place boys and girls, families and communities at risk of child sexual exploitation and abuse.
- Recommendations for law makers for legal changes include:
  - Article 321 of the Criminal Code (as modified by Law no. 263 Against Human Trafficking) should be amended to ensure that the means of carrying out these offences is immaterial when committed against any child under 18. Further, the Article should be amended so as to ensure that no child may consent to their own exploitation.
  - Bolivia's legislative provisions regarding online child sexual exploitation remain far from the requisite standard in prohibiting all related offences. The legislation requires a clearer definition of what amounts to child sexual abuse material, therefore leaving doubt as to whether materials such as audio, written or digitally-generated child sexual abuse material would be prohibited.
  - The downloading or knowingly obtaining child sexual abuse materials should be prohibited under the Bolivian legal framework.
  - Adopt specific legislation that explicitly outlaws offences relating to the sexual extortion of children in the online environment. In addition, it is important that modifications are made to the law to criminalise the offences of online grooming and live streaming of child sexual abuse. However, provisions should be included so as to exclude children's liability from sharing sexual material, thereby ensuring that children will not face prosecution for producing materials in an exploitative situation or when consensually sharing such material with a peer.
- Internet service providers should be legally required to filter, block and report instances of child sexual abuse material encountered on their servers.
- With regard to trafficking, Bolivia's legislation should be amended to establish the irrelevance of proving the means of trafficking in cases involving children. Further, the legislation could be improved by creating a standalone provision prohibiting the sale of children.
- Bolivia should enact legislation that explicitly criminalises the advertising or offering of child sexual exploitation in the context of travel and tourism.
- It is important that the statutes of limitation periods are removed for all crimes related to sexual exploitation of children.
- Whilst it is possible for children to claim compensation in Bolivia for crimes of child sexual exploitation, the process should be simplified and expanded to ensure that all child victims are able to access financial compensation for the suffering they have endured.

# ANNEX 1: SCENARIOS

Support workers were given five hypothetical scenarios about sexual exploitation, which reflected unequal power relationships, gender norms and other intersectional vulnerabilities. Questions were interspersed as the scenario unfolded to unpack different attitudes and knowledge. Following each scenario, participants were asked to describe what practical steps they would take if they were supporting the children depicted. Below is a summary of responses.

## “Adam”

*19-year-old Peti pays a 17-year-old cousin, Adam, to undress while filming. Adam agrees to do it without concerns.*

Ninety-one percent of participants agreed that Adam had been sexually exploited, with 9% judging that Adam was not a victim.

*“Peti later posts this video to his online social media accounts that are publicly visible (no payment is needed to access them).”*

With this additional revelation, 89% were clear that Peti had committed sexual exploitation, however six believed he had not done wrong.

*“Zoli, who does not know Peti or Adam, finds and watches the video online from home elsewhere in the country.”*

Given this information, only 62% of participants responded that this viewing of child sexual abuse material was sexual exploitation. 36 percent did not believe viewing child sexual abuse material was problematic and two respondents were unsure.

The ‘practical steps or immediate responses suggested by support workers were diverse. Some highlighted the negligence of the social media service providers, which could suspend the content at social media platform, referring (FW 129, FW21, FW37).

A group of support workers tend to focus on intervention through counselling, either psycho-social or legal to both Adam and Peti while assuming the lack of knowledge about crimes related to child sexual abuse material. Thus, some support workers suggest, counselling of Adam should be based on the fact that Adam may not recognise, he is a victim and possible impact (FW48). Adam should be informed about current laws and regulations, his rights and make him understand that he may be a victim and involve his parents to report the crime. On the other hand, Peti should be explained about his activities in social media, his involvement in crime of “pornography”, legal provision in Bolivia and legal consequence he may face.

Other responses suggest precaution and assess the situation before offering any intervention, such as some proactive actions by visiting their social media profile to get sense of the family background, meet their family members, try to establish what might had happened and then decide what support would be appropriate.

Some respondents are straightforward on reporting the incident to the police or concerned authority to initiate immediate investigation and action, arguing such actions may help protect Adam immediately.

## “Abel”

*Abel is a 7-year-old boy whose mother struggles to make ends meet in their rural village. His uncle, Gergo, has a good government job and has always given money to help the family out. Recently, during a visit to Abel’s family home, the uncle asked Abel to sit on his lap and touches him.*

Twenty percent agreed that Abel had been exploited, yet 33% said that he had not been exploited, and 11 participants were uncertain. One said it was not exploitation but sexual abuse/ indecent touching (FW 22).

*“While Abel was sitting on the uncle’s lap, the uncle began to touch his private parts. Abel’s mother then walks into the room and realises that something is happening. The uncle reminds Abel’s mother of how happy he is to be able to visit them today and provides her with some money.*”

The majority of participants (76%) now believed that the uncle had committed sexual exploitation, although nine still held that he had not committed sexual exploitation, and four were uncertain.

*“Abel’s mother nodded, closed the door and went out of the house”*

The majority of support workers (76%) believed that Abel’s mother was responsible for facilitating sexual exploitation, but 18% believed that she was not to blame (And three remained uncertain).

Many of the support workers’ practical responses to this scenario focused on correcting or educating Abel about the difference between ‘good touch’ and ‘bad touch’ and counselling the mother about child protection (FW 99, FW 129, FW 60).

Some participants suggested legal responses targeting Gergo as well as a few responses that suggested to rescue and place Abel to safe home through removal of the child from the care of the mother (FW 122, FW 38).

Some respondents suggest to report the sexual abuse to the concern authority as an intervention of rescuing Abel and to take action against mother for negligence in the care provided and against the uncle for committing sexual exploitation.

## “Dani”

*Dani is a 16-year-old boy who prides himself on being a hard worker. When his adult neighbour, Sandor, asked if he could help work on her farm for payment, he was happy to help. While Dani was working around the farm, Sandor invited Dani into the house for lunch. Sandor sat very close to Dani and touched his arm often while chatting. Dani felt very uncomfortable with this.*

Thirty-six percent of participants said that Dani had experienced sexual exploitation.

While forty-seven percent participants think that the act of touching an arm while chatting may not constitute sexual exploitation. Nineteen participants were uncertain about the situation.

*“The next time Dani helped at the farm; the same thing happened at lunch. This time, Sandor touched Dani’s thigh. This also made Dani very uncomfortable.”*

In this clearer situation, more support workers (49%) believed that Dani had been exploited though 19 still held that he hadn’t, and eight were uncertain.

Many of the ‘practical steps’ recommended focused on offering protection and providing education and awareness to Dani on “his bodily rights” and “good touch/bad touch” (FW 20, FW 40, FW 107, FW 110).

A number of respondents pushed back some responsibility to Dani and her family saying Dani should stop visiting such neighbour (FW 46, FW 108, FW72, FW 106). Some respondents suggest rescue, healthcare and psychosocial support (FW 122), four suggested to report the case and seek legal support, (FW 67, FW 102, FW119, FW 122).

## “Jani”

*Jani is 15 years old, although he looks older. He self-identifies as gay. On the weekends, Jani meets men, who he describes as his ‘boyfriends’. He has sex with them and accepts money and gifts. When asked about these encounters, Jani says that it is his choice, and that other people should mind their own business.*

Eighty-nine percent of workers correctly identified Jani as a victim of sexual exploitation, although nine percent did not and one was uncertain. Considering “the men” that Jani meets on the weekends, Ninety-four percent (94%) participants correctly identified the men as exploiters, 4% did not, and one was uncertain.

The majority (90%) of the support workers indicating that Jani had experienced sexual exploitation, focusing on his age as minor and lack

of knowledge about relevant laws and his own rights, therefore suggest counselling support to Jani.

Most participants raise the concern on Jani's age (15 years) and his qualification of giving consent, and necessity to educate him (FW 81, FW82, FW 54, FW 84, FW 102, FW122). Participants suggested to start intervention with a non-judgmental approach (FW 111, FW 113),

While supporting the fact that Jani is exploited a number participants recommend counselling and professional intervention (FW 92, FW 96, FW 110). Some suggest before taking any action a background check is necessary to analyse his family environment (FW 48, FW 99). Some respondents suggest legal action (FW 37, FW 26).

## “Marci”

*Marci is 17 years old and identifies as a transgender person. Marci used to live in the countryside but faced discrimination from family and neighbours. Marci moved to the city but could not find a place to stay. Marci has not been able to find work and is homeless. Marci needs to pay for food, so quite often meets men and sometimes women, and has sex with them for money. Marci accepts that this life is tough but only temporary.*

Ninety percent of participants correctly identified Marci as a victim of sexual exploitation, though 8% held that Marci had not been exploited and 2% is uncertain.

*“On one occasion, Marci was arrested for prostitution and intends to plead guilty.”*

Ninety percent of participants correctly identified that the men and women that Marci met for sex had committed sexual exploitation, while 6% disagree and 4% is uncertain.

While majority of the participants have identified the case as sexual exploitation, the practical responses centered on the provision of legal support (FW 21, FW 26, FW37, FW56) including livelihood help and safe shelter while highlighting the fact of discrimination caused due to the sexual orientation of the victim.

Some participants focus on educating Marci to explain to him that when an adult gives money or gifts to a boy, girl or adolescents or third person to perform sexual, erotic or pornographic acts with them as a minor, they are committing the crime of “commercial sexual violence” (FW 46, FW 113).

Some participants recommend considering the sexual orientation of victim as the key to consideration of intervention as being from the LGBTI population makes him more vulnerable to discrimination, the offenders should be reported, reporting the crime is necessary, (FW 83, FW 92).

Some suggested other possibilities can be given which permit positive livelihood without resorting to conditions which could create negative impacts on their life (FW 107, FW 111).

Most participants demonstrated that such a case requires comprehensive support which should be combined with shelter, healthcare, livelihood and psychosocial, so all relevant service providers should be contacted (FW 38, FW 40, FW 67, FW 96, FW 111).

Contact with the parents or caretakers was recommended. In the case of not reaching them, access a shelter or foster home. Other recommendations included: individual counselling about sexual exploitation; medical assistance for the prevention of sexually transmitted diseases; provision of basic needs such as food, clothing. (FW96, FW 110, FW 122).







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