



**SEXUAL
EXPLOITATION OF
BOYS**



PAKISTAN REPORT

March, 2022

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The views expressed herein are solely those of ECPAT International. Support does not constitute endorsement of the opinions expressed.

This publication is based on a research project undertaken by ECPAT International and PAHCHAAN in Pakistan as part of the Global Boys Initiative.

From ECPAT International:

Alastair Hilton, Jarrett Davis, Guncha Sharma, Andrea Varrella, Mark Kavenagh, Lene Andersen, Freddie Nickolds.

From PAHCHAAN:

Dr. Naeem Zafar, Mehek Naeem, Syed Miqdad Mehdi, Muhammad Khalid, Dr. Tufail Muhammad

Design and layout by:

Manida Naebklang

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Cover illustration:

The illustrations on the cover of this report depict environments and situations relevant to the sexual exploitation of boys in Pakistan. **From top to bottom:** Boys in mining communities are vulnerable to sexual exploitation; The practice of '*bacha bazi*' where boys are kept by wealthy men in their homes and sexually exploited; Trucks at a Pakistani truck stop which are known locations where the sexual exploitation of boys takes place.

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ECPAT International

328/1 Phaya Thai Road, Ratchathewi,
Bangkok, 10400 Thailand

Tel: +662 215 3388 | www.ecpat.org | info@ecpat.org

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BACKGROUND & RATIONALE

Violence against children, including child sexual exploitation and abuse (CSEA), is estimated to affect millions of children worldwide and no country or region is ‘immune’.¹ It has the potential to impact upon children in all socio-economic groups, of all educational levels, and across all ethnic and cultural groups.² 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.³ While it is widely accepted that girls are disproportionately at risk of sexual exploitation, there has been an increasing awareness that there is a gap in the global understanding of how boys are impacted.⁴ The limited evidence available suggests that in some contexts where more boys are found, they may even be at greater risk.⁵ Boys – regardless of whether they are heterosexual or of diverse sexual orientation – may also face legal consequences in countries where homosexuality is criminalized if the offender is male.

The influence of gender norms around masculinity and femininity are important to consider in understanding the sexual exploitation of children, and we can observe that what is attributed to one gender, often differs for others. These norms typically hold that males are strong and invulnerable, less likely to be victimized or less likely to be harmed if they are. Conversely, girls are often considered vulnerable, including to exploitation, and are expected to be significantly affected and in need of support.

These norms can hamper the responses to sexual exploitation of boys, whereby the development of policies, practices, advocacy and research may underrepresent or exclude 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.”⁶

While these circumstances should by no means detract attention from continued research, advocacy, and support for girls subjected to sexual exploitation, there is a clear need for greater advocacy, understanding and a higher quality evidence-based on the sexual exploitation of children of all genders, to better inform all work to prevent and respond appropriately to their needs.

A Global Boys’ Initiative

ECPAT International launched the **Global Boys’ Initiative** to explore the sexual exploitation of boys, activating our worldwide network of member organizations in a range of research and response activities focused on boys. To meet the initial challenge of limited data, in 2020-21, the Global Boys’ Initiative embarked on a series of research projects in ten countries around the world, to shed light on the understanding of sexual exploitation involving boys, what factors lead to their vulnerability and increased risk, and what their needs are in terms of prevention, protection and support services. Much of this initial research phase was generously funded by Sida, which allowed primary research to be conducted through partnerships between the

- 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. 4.
- 3 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.
- 4 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).
- 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).

ECPAT International secretariat and national ECPAT member organizations.

This Report

PAHCHAAN (Protection and Help of Children Against Abuse and Neglect) has been at the forefront of actions to prevent and respond to sexual exploitation of children in Pakistan since 2005. PAHCHAAN is a partner of the Child Rights Group of Pakistan Paediatric Association which has been part of the ECPAT International network since 1998. PAHCHAAN and ECPAT International partnered to conduct this ground-breaking research into the sexual exploitation of boys in Pakistan during 2021, with results captured in this report.

The project in Pakistan included the following activities:

- A survey of 63 frontline social support workers from a range of services in Pakistan, and who had supported boys subjected to sexual exploitation or abuse.
- An analysis of how well Pakistan's legal framework protects children from sexual exploitation, with a focus on boys.

The findings captured in this report are intended to identify existing strengths, areas for improvement, and inform service improvements to ensure that they are gender-sensitive and accessible for children of all genders. It is hoped that the findings will also contribute to breaking down the stigma surrounding boys' experiences of sexual exploitation and abuse in Pakistan. Clear, actionable recommendations that are driven by the evidence, are also provided.

COUNTRY CONTEXT

Pakistan is a South Asian country with a population of over 221 million people, 90 million of which are under the age of 18 and 28 million of which are under the age of five.⁷ Recent data that specifically focuses on the sexual exploitation and abuse of boys in Pakistan is very limited. A South Asian regional review published by UNICEF in 2010 summarises some evidence indicating that sexual exploitation of boys in Pakistan was observed in prostitution; in travel and tourism environments and related businesses; amongst street-connected boys; in the context of child labor; in educational and religious institutions, and prisons.^{8,9} More recently, a retrospective analysis with undergraduate students at the University of the Punjab, Lahore, indicated that as many as 44% of male respondents reported experiencing some form of sexual abuse during childhood, with most frequent offenders being parents, friends, and teachers.¹⁰

Additionally, some practices have been identified in Pakistan that increase boys' vulnerability. For example, in Northwest border provinces, wealthy men retain boys in their households under the guise of providing education, though these boys are frequently sexually exploited. This practice, known as bacha baazi, is similarly observed across the border in Afghanistan.¹¹

More broadly, it is widely established that inaccessible education¹² and poverty¹³ increase vulnerability of children to sexual exploitation,

with both these factors affecting many children in Pakistan. In 2019, 18% of boys and 29% of girls of primary school age were not enrolled in primary education, and 57% of boys and 67% of girls of secondary school age were not enrolled in upper secondary education.¹⁴ Latest available estimates indicated that 24.3% of the population live in poverty,¹⁵ while in 2018, the UN World Food Programme found 18% of children under five years of age suffer from acute malnutrition.¹⁶ Boys in Pakistan are also known to be vulnerable to sexual exploitation when engaged in hawking, begging, scavenging, and other informal work.¹⁷ Boys who work in small hotels close to bus terminals or highways have also been identified as coerced into exploitation through prostitution by employers.¹⁸ Transport settings, dominated by males, are a high risk environment, with boys working as helpers, or '*kailashis*', for truck drivers, also highly vulnerable to sexual exploitation.¹⁹ The links between child labor and sexual exploitation are established, with Pakistani boy laborers recorded as subjected to sexual exploitation in factories, mines, and workshops.²⁰ Furthermore, the 2021 US Trafficking in Persons Report highlighted that the sexual exploitation of boys in one coalmining community in the Balochistan region was widespread, with boys as young as six years old purportedly lured to work in mines but subjected to trafficking for sexual purposes instead.²¹

A 2021 analysis of media reports published

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- 7 UNICEF. (2021). *The State of the World's Children 2021. On My Mind: Promoting, protecting and caring for children's mental health.* 190.
 - 8 Frederick, J. (2010). *Sexual Abuse and Exploitation of Boys in South Asia - A Review of Research Findings, Legislation, Policy and Programme Responses.* Innocenti Working Paper No. 2010-02. Florence, UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre.
 - 9 PAHCHAAN. (2020). *Ten Years Data of Child Abuse and Neglect Cases Managed at the First Hospital Based Child Protection Unit in Pakistan.*
 - 10 Abbas, S. S., & Jabeen, T. (2020). *Prevalence of child abuse among the university students: a retrospective cross-sectional study in University of the Punjab, Pakistan.* International quarterly of community health education, 40(2), 125-134.
 - 11 Pakistan Paediatric Association; ECPAT International. (2017). *Submission for the Universal Periodic Review of the human rights situation in Pakistan*, para 5.
 - 12 London Metropolitan University. (2017). *Key messages from research on child sexual exploitation: Professionals in school settings.* 5.
 - 13 ECPAT International. *Power, Impunity and Anonymity.* 43.
 - 14 UNICEF. (2019). *The State of the World's Children 2019.* 230.
 - 15 World Bank. (2020). *Poverty & Equity Brief South Asia Pakistan April 2020.*
 - 16 UNWFP. (2019). *Pakistan.*
 - 17 PAHCHAAN. (2021). Personal communication.
 - 18 PAHCHAAN. (2021). Personal communication.
 - 19 Frederick, J. (2010). *Sexual Abuse and Exploitation of Boys in South Asia - A Review of Research Findings, Legislation, Policy and Programme Responses.* Innocenti Working Paper No. 2010-02. Florence, UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre.
 - 20 US Department of Labor. (2019). *2019 Findings on the Worst Forms of Labor: Pakistan.* 2.
 - 21 US Department of State. (2021). *2021 Trafficking in Persons Report: Pakistan.*

in 2020 showed 84 national and regional newspapers in Pakistan detailed child sexual abuse against boys and girls.²² The analysis found that 2960 child sexual abuse cases were reported in newspapers in 2020, of which 49% involved boy victims.²³ Similar figures (46%) were evident also in 2019.²⁴ Media reports covered rape, attempted rape, gang rape, sodomy, gang sodomy, abductions, and incidents of missing children. The most vulnerable age group was identified as 6-15 years, with most of the victims within this age range being boys.²⁵

Pakistan has some criminal provisions that help to protect children from sexual abuse and exploitation. However, there are some sexual offences that are currently defined only as applicable to girls and women – and thus result in reduced legal protection for boys. For example, offences such as procurement for prostitution under the Penal Code exclusively applies to women and girls. For similar offences involving boy victims, there are no explicit provisions. Furthermore, as homosexuality is illegal in Pakistan,²⁶ boys who have been sexually exploited by men may not feel able or safe to disclose their experiences for fear of criminalization. The legislative context in Pakistan overall, is very likely to inhibit boys from seeking help for sexual exploitation and abuse.

INTERNATIONAL AND REGIONAL LEGAL COMMITMENTS

Pakistan has demonstrated its commitment to the protection of children's rights by 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 (CRC Convention),²⁷ which was ratified by

Pakistan in 1990. This Convention is the primary international document that contains provisions to protect children from 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 (OPSC)²⁸ was ratified by Pakistan in 2001, emphasising its continued engagement with the international response to the sexual exploitation of children. Pakistan last reported to the Committee on the Rights of the Child regarding the implementation of the OPSC at country level in 2019, although the report was due in 2013. As of January 2022 the Committee is yet to review the report and release its concluding observations.

Pakistan has yet to ratify the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on a communications procedure, which recognises that children have the right to appeal to international mechanisms specific to them, when national mechanisms fail to address violations effectively.²⁹

In addition to the CRC Convention and its protocols, Pakistan is party to other key instruments that have been adopted by the international community in its actions to protect children from sexual exploitation and abuse. These include the International Labor Organization Convention No. 182 Concerning the Prohibition and Immediate Action for the Elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labor (ILO Convention No. 182),³⁰ ratified by Pakistan in 2011. Through ratifying these instruments and thereby agreeing to ensure their effective implementation and enforcement, Pakistan has endeavoured to adopt legislative measures to effectively prohibit the forms of sexual exploitation of children prescribed within. However, Pakistan has neither signed nor ratified the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in persons, Especially Women and

22 Sahil. (2020). [Cruel Numbers 2020 Report](#). 1.

23 Sahil. (2020). [Cruel Numbers 2020 Report](#). 1.

24 Sahil. (2019). [Cruel Numbers 2019 Report](#). 1

25 Sahil. (2019). [Cruel Numbers 2019 Report](#). 8

26 Government of Pakistan. (1860). [Pakistan Penal Code \(Act No. XLV of 1860\)](#), Sections 366A and 366B.

27 United Nations. (1989). [UN Convention on the Rights of the Child](#).

28 UN General Assembly. (2000, May 25). [Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography](#).

29 UN General Assembly. (2011). [Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on a communications procedure](#). UN Doc. A/RES/66/138.

30 ILO. (1999). [Worst Forms of Child Labor Convention. \(1999\). \(No. 182\)](#).

Children, supplementing the UN convention against Transnational Organized Crime (UN Trafficking Protocol).³¹

As a member of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), Pakistan has ratified several important instruments that form the backbone of the regional response to the sexual exploitation of children. This includes the SAARC Convention on Preventing and Combating Trafficking in Women and Children³² and SAARC Convention on Regional Arrangements for the Promotion of Child Welfare in South Asia,³³ ratified in 2002.

Pakistan is also one of the member countries of the South Asia End Violence Against Children (SAIEVAC) intergovernmental body, an apex body of SAARC. SAIEVAC aims to safeguard the rights of all children across South Asia to live in an environment that is free from all forms of abuse, exploitation, violence, discrimination, and neglect.³⁴

A National Action and Coordinating Group against Violence against Women and Children was established in each South Asian country, including Pakistan, to strengthen interagency work aimed at ending violence against children, and linkages were developed with the regional South Asia Coordinating Group on Action against Violence against Women and Children of SAIEVAC.³⁵ In practice, it has been observed that the National Action and Coordinating Group has not been very active.³⁶

The government implemented the National Action Plan on Human Rights in 2016 which included specific measures relating to child rights. Under this plan, a national policy was reportedly being framed by the Ministry of Human Rights, that seeks to protect children from violence, discrimination, abuse, and exploitation - including sale of children, exploitation in prostitution and child sexual abuse material.³⁷ As of January 2022 the policy has yet to be implemented.

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

32 South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC). (2002). [Convention on Prevention and Combating Trafficking of Women and Children for Prostitution.](#)

33 South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC). (2002). [Convention on Regional Arrangements for the Promotion of Child Welfare in South Asia.](#)

34 South Asia End Violence Against Children (SAIEVAC). (n.d.). [About us.](#)

35 South Asia End Violence Against Children (SAIEVAC). (n.d.). [National Action and Coordinating Group against violence against women and children \(NACG\).](#)

36 PAHCHAAN. (2021). Personal Communication.

37 Committee on the Rights of the Child. (2019). [Report submitted by Pakistan under article 12 \(1\) of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography, due in 2013*](#), para 55-56.

METHODOLOGY

The main purpose of the research in Pakistan was to build an empirical foundation for an increased understanding of the sexual exploitation of boys. To generate new primary data, the methodology included a survey for frontline support workers with both quantitative and qualitative components, and documentary analysis of national legislation related to sexual exploitation and abuse of children.

FRONTLINE SUPPORT WORKERS' SURVEY

The frontline support workers' survey aims to measure the access to, and quality and effectiveness of, support services regarding sexual exploitation and abuse that are available to boys in Pakistan in order to highlight strengths and areas of improvement, and provide recommendations for service development, skills, and knowledge training.

Rationale

Workforce surveys have increasingly been used in research to gain an understanding of the effectiveness of social support systems. Most commonly these surveys are used by health³⁸ and social work professions³⁹ to measure service delivery effectiveness.

Social support to children who are subjected to sexual exploitation and abuse is generally provided within the broader context of child protection. We therefore developed and delivered a survey for child protection workers, and those most likely to encounter children, to explore their perceptions. Sampling support workers enables us to gain valuable insights into their perspectives. These included their ideas related to the sexual exploitation of boys, exploring boys' access to these services, perceptions of the quality and

effectiveness of services in supporting boys, as well as details about the nature of their direct work with boys.

Sample

Organizations in Pakistan who provide child protection support services were identified and approached by PAHCHAAN. While the research focuses on boys, very few focused services for boys exist in Pakistan, thus the sample includes support workers who work with sexually exploited children of any gender. Once identified, survey administrators from PAHCHAAN contacted management staff of organizations to explain the survey and invite the participation of frontline staff. Participants were included on the basis that they were over 18 years of age, with at least 12 months of experience in service provision and had a current caseload which included children. The cohort was a 'convenience sample', and thus is not representative of the population of frontline support workers in Pakistan. The sampled organizations were also mostly urban-based, as most social support services tend to be concentrated in more populated urban areas. Further to this, different types of support services were included in the sample design. In total, 63 frontline support workers from Pakistan who currently provide services for child victims of sexual exploitation were included in the sample, 56 of whom completed all questions and seven of whom completed at least 70% of the survey questions.

Self-administered online tools alone (emailing a survey link) have notoriously low participation rates. Thus, the design opted for in-person administration using an online tool. Appointments were made with eligible staff for the survey administrators from PAHCHAAN to further explain the project, the consent process and assist with self-administration of the survey via an online link. Appointments were planned to occur face-

38 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.](#)

39 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 contribution's agenda for social work and social development.](#)

to-face, but COVID-19 restrictions meant that they were completed via phone calls or chat apps. Administrators remained on standby to support, offer guidance and troubleshoot as the participants completed the survey. The personal connection helped motivate participants to complete the survey, and data collection took place in April and May 2021.

The survey

The online survey consisted of 121 multiple-choice and short open answer questions and was developed in English in consultation with the Global Boys Initiative Steering Committee. The draft tool was then translated to Urdu, and ECPAT International and PAHCHAAN collaborated to check and contextualise the survey, which was pilot tested with a small number of local social support workers before being fielded.

Analysis

Following data collection, data was cleaned, and open-ended responses were translated to English. Survey output was integrated into a custom analytical framework created using Google Sheets. Additional analysis was then conducted based upon emerging themes and patterns that arose from the data. Qualitative analytical components were then added to the framework, and thematic analyses were conducted for each variable. Analysis and writing were completed by two international experts with specialization in sexual exploitation of boys and male vulnerability. In the findings, quantitative and qualitative themes and patterns are explored, with direct (translated) quotes illustrating the dominant narratives emerging from the quantitative data, along with occasional dissenting views (where available). Care was taken during analysis not to present any qualitative responses that may have identified participants. Once completed, the analysts consulted with PAHCHAAN to explore for further insights and to validate the findings.

It should be noted that the data is not statistically representative of the experiences of all frontline support workers in Pakistan. 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 support for boys subjected to sexual exploitation and abuse in Pakistan. Many participants shared additional observations and illustrative anecdotes for open response items throughout the survey, that further identified challenges and potential opportunities for action and progress in this area.

ANALYSIS OF THE LEGAL FRAMEWORK

The documentary legislative analysis aimed to identify legal gaps, barriers, and opportunities in addressing the sexual exploitation of children, with a focus on boys. It adopted a standardised review method. Specifically, a checklist including approximately 120 points and sub-points was created by ECPAT International to support the analysis for all countries in the Global Boys' Initiative. Staff from PAHCHAAN explored the national legislation and completed the checklist, followed by research staff from ECPAT International using this information to inform further analysis, and compile a narrative. This draft was then validated and confirmed in collaboration between the two teams and makes up Chapter 5 of this report. The findings identify areas for advocacy to amend and improve legal responses.

ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Given the inherent vulnerability of children, research on child sexual abuse and exploitation must be designed in ways that abide by strict ethical standards.⁴⁰ For this project, ECPAT International convened a panel of three global experts for an independent third-party review of our proposed methodology. A detailed research protocol that included mitigations for ethical risks, 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.

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

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

participant wished to withdraw from the study, they were free to do so at any time before they completed the survey. Participants were also informed that their responses would be used to write a research report. To protect participant anonymity, names were not requested at any stage of completing the survey.

LIMITATIONS

A limitation occurred due to our inclusion criteria. Our intent was to include support workers who worked directly at the frontline (not higher up managers). Thus, a hurdle question sought experience of working directly with children “within the last 12 months.” One hundred and ninety-seven participants were disqualified by hurdle questions as they selected ‘no’ to active cases or working directly with children during the last 12 months. As data collection occurred in the first half of 2021, the impacts of COVID-19 restrictions may have meant some frontline workers were unable to do direct client-facing work, so some of these exclusions may have been because of COVID-19 restrictions rather than related to whether their role was frontline or not.

While all respondents had the option of taking the survey in either English or Urdu, the majority (81%) opted to take the survey in English, despite that being a second language with various levels of proficiency. Although English proficiency of individual participants is not known, upon analysing the data it became evident that some participants seemed to struggle to express themselves clearly in the English language. This is a limitation due as it is possible that some participants may not have been able to express themselves fully within all open-ended questions.

FRONTLINE SUPPORT WORKERS' SURVEY

OVERVIEW OF SAMPLE

The 63 support workers in the sample were drawn from 12 different municipalities, with the majority coming from Lahore (74%). Slightly less than half of the sample (48%) identified as female and 33 (52%) identified as male. Nearly two-thirds of participants (65%) worked in a non-government organization and 14 (22%) worked within the government. Three respondents worked for faith-based organizations. Lastly, two worked in private

clinical settings, and one worked within a school. The vast majority provided all or some of their services within an urban context, with 36 (57%) working only in an urban context, and 23 (37%) working in both urban and rural contexts. Only four participants worked solely in a rural context. The majority of the sample had either a master's or PhD-level education (75%) and 16 (25%) had a bachelor's degree. Advanced degrees were largely in the areas of psychology, clinical psychology, sociology, and anthropology.

Figure 1. Time providing social support to children. (N=63)

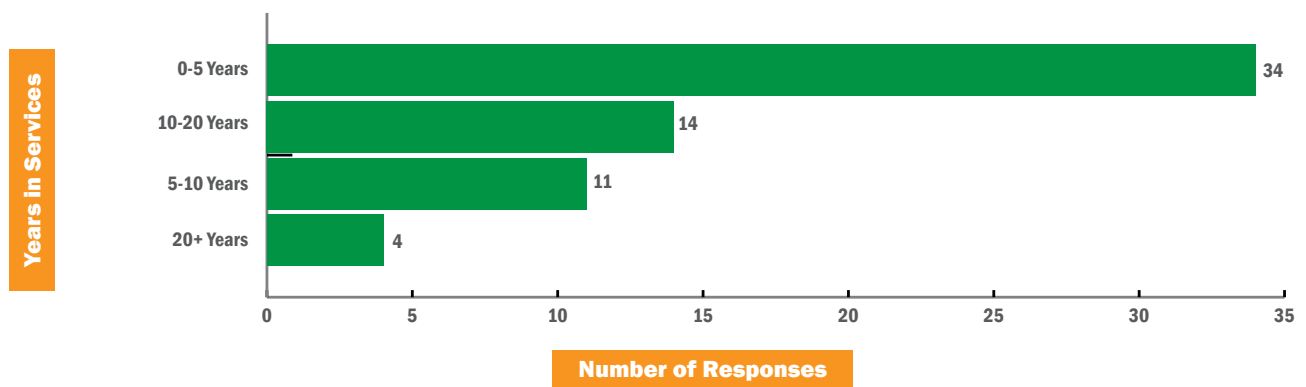


Figure 1 shows that more than half of support workers (54%) had less than five years of experience providing support to children and 22% had between five and ten years of experience. Nearly a third (29%) had more than 10 years of experience. Pakistan has largely established its child protection system across the country over the last decade which may account for the relatively few years of experience reported.

SERVICES PROVIDED

Support workers provided a diverse range of services. All but one participant (98%) provided at least some form of physical and mental health services. This included 73% who provided some form of one-on-one counselling, 46% who delivered some form of sexual health information or support, and 43% who provided group-psycho-social support. To a lesser extent, 29%

provided medical care. Only three respondents reported that their organizations provided LGBT-specific support.

Most respondents provided further descriptions of the types of one-on-one counselling or group-support that they provided (n= 52). Descriptions were diverse and included various forms of psychosocial support, as well as more formal trauma therapies, psychological counselling and behavioural support. The types of support largely fell into the following three categories:

- **General counselling (48%).** This category included general individual and group psychosocial support and guidance related to CSEA, as well as general life and guidance counselling.
- **Psychological counselling (32%).** This included more formal therapeutic support within both clinical and field settings. While most of these

descriptions focused on individualized support, a few also included specific psychosocial support within families and communities.

- **Specialized support for CSEA (16%).** Some respondents described providing specialized services for sexual violence and exploitation and related traumas. This included specific cognitive behavioural therapies, hypnotherapy, and other specialized psychosocial support.

In addition to physical and mental health services, support workers also provided various forms of socio-economic support. This includes 40% who provided basic supplies, such as food or clothing, as well as 44% who provided legal support. Economic assistance, such as cash transfers, were also provided by 24%. Lastly, 32% provided reintegration support.

The majority of respondents also indicated providing some form of family support services, including 48% who provided support for families/ caregivers and 31% who provided some form of residential care. Most provided at least some form of access to both formal and non-formal education, including support to access formal high school (37%), tertiary studies (13%), non-formal education (43%) and vocational training (29%).

Training regarding CSEA

Forty-three respondents reported training that they had received regarding sexual exploitation of children:

- **Issue-specific training (42%).** This includes informational trainings related to CSEA within

a variety of specific contexts, including human trafficking, children on the move, and disaster response.

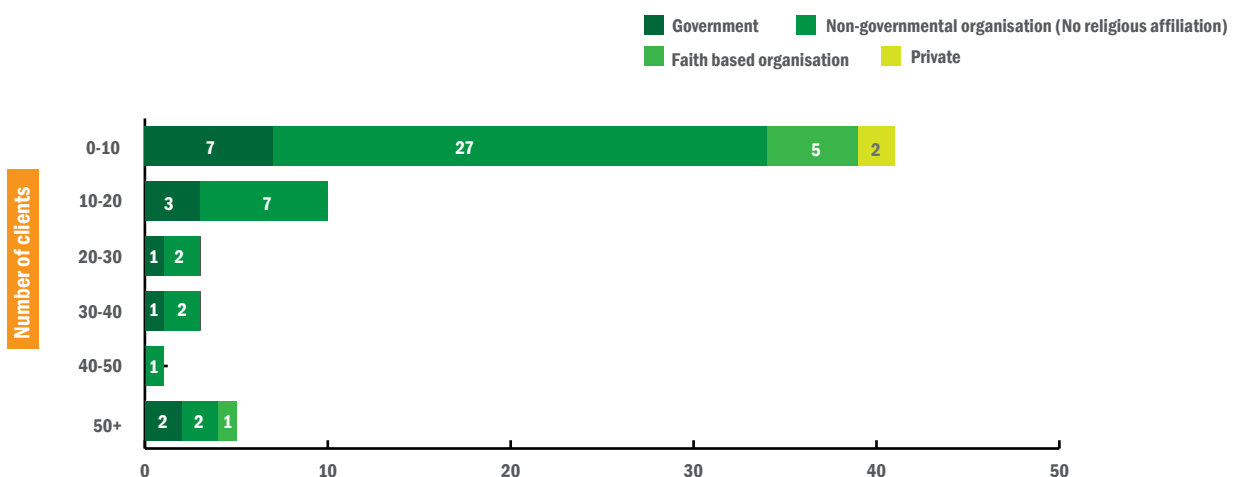
- **Therapeutic training (33%).** Some support workers described a variety of intervention-focused practitioner training for working with trauma, including sexual trauma. This includes several participants with ‘psychological first aid’ training, as well as training in specific art and cognitive-behavioural therapies.
- **General child protection training (four people).** About one in ten described general child protection training and awareness, which includes the topic of CSEA.

Lastly, three people described various formal bachelors or masters-level education in psychology, which included education on CSEA.

TOTAL CASELOADS

Participants were asked to describe their total caseloads (including breakdowns for children who had and had not been subjected to sexual exploitation). Figure 2 shows that 65% of respondents had caseloads of 10 children or fewer. Twelve workers were responsible for caseloads of 20 children or greater. Five respondents reported caseloads of 50 or more children which was explained by their work in settings such as schools, where they had fewer interactions with greater numbers of clients. For these five workers, CSEA awareness and response was part of their work, but they did provide specialized support.

Figure 2. Caseload compared with organisation type. (N=63).



We asked participants to estimate what percentage of their clients were boys. One support worker came from an organization that only provided services to girls and four support workers came from organizations that only provided services to boys, with participants estimating (on average) that boys comprised well over half (59%) of the children in their caseloads. Fourteen support workers had caseloads that were greater than 60% boys.

In separate sections, support workers were asked to consider the cases of sexual exploitation they see, which involve boy victims and then of girl victims. Each section asked them to reflect on age and gender of children, the offenders, as well as to provide details about the most common relationships that they witnessed between offenders and the children subjected to sexual exploitation. As some respondents were from organizations that supported only boys or only girls, subsamples are reported for workers whose caseloads included boys (n=62) and workers whose caseloads included girls (n=59).

Cases involving boys

Support workers estimated that about 43% of the boys they supported were known to have experienced sexual exploitation. Figure 3 shows that 21% of those boys were targeted before the age of 5, and 36% between the ages of 5 and 10. The most common age of victimization was between 11 and 15. The most commonly reported exchange involved in the exploitation was money (49%) followed by goods (29%), shelter (13%) or security (5%).

Figure 3. Common age of boys' victimization.

Age	Proportion of boys
0-5 years	21%
6-10 years	36%
11-15 years	37%
16-17 years	26%

Cases involving girls

Support workers estimated that about 50% of the girls that they supported were known to

have experienced sexual exploitation. Figure 4 shows that 21% of those girls were targeted before the age of 5 and 31% between the ages of 5 and 10. As with boys, the most common age of victimization was between 11 and 15 years of age. The most commonly reported exchange involved in the sexual exploitation was again money (32%) followed by security (28%), goods (25%) or shelter (2%).

Figure 4. Common age of girls' victimization.

Age	Proportion of girls
0-5 years	21%
6-10 years	31%
11-15 years	37%
16-17 years	30%

GENDER OF OFFENDERS

Participants indicated that 73% of the cases that they supported involving boys had male offenders and 27% had female offenders. This was quite similar in relation to the girls who had been subjected to sexual exploitation – where 74% of cases involved male offenders and 26% had female offenders. Offenders may include both people committing abuse as well as those who facilitate abuse. Participants also estimated that the majority of offenders were Pakistan nationals, with only 26% of offenders targeting boys and 33% targeting girls to be estimated as foreign nationals.

Offenders in cases involving boys

Support workers were asked about the common relationships that were involved in boys' sexual exploitation, depicted in Figure 5. Family friends topped the list for both male (49%) and female offenders (43%). Other adult community members and relatives were also noted.

Interesting to note is that 22 participants said sexual abuse or exploitation by male relatives under the age of 18 was commonly observed. These peer-aged instances of abuse within families bears further exploration.

Figure 5. Common offenders in boys' sexual exploitation.

Common relationship when male offenders were involved		
Family friend	31	49%
Community member (over 18)	30	48%
Other relative (over 18)	27	43%
Other relative (under 18)	22	35%
Person in authority (e.g., teacher, religious leader)	17	27%
Parent/Stepparent	16	25%

Common relationships when female offenders were involved		
Family friend	27	43%
Other relative (over 18)	21	33%
Community member (over 18)	21	33%
Parent/Stepparent	15	24%
Other relative (under 18)	13	21%
Local Stranger (national citizen)	12	19%

* Three responses per participant could be selected so % do not add to 100.

Offenders in cases involving girls

Support workers were then asked about the common relationships that were involved in girls' sexual exploitation, depicted in Figure 6 below. Observations varied only slightly from boys, though relatives were higher on the lists than where boys were victimized.

Figure 6. Common offenders in girls' sexual exploitation.

Common relationships when male offenders were involved		
Other relative (over 18)	32	51%
Family friend	29	46%
Parent/Stepparent	19	30%
Other relative (under 18)	16	25%
Community member (over 18)	15	24%
Local Stranger (national citizen)	9	14%

Common relationships when female offenders were involved		
Family friend	24	38%
Community member (over 18)	20	32%
Other relative (over 18)	19	30%
Parent/Stepparent	14	22%
Other relative (under 18)	11	17%
Sibling (over 18)	11	17%

* Three responses per participant could be selected so % do not add to 100.

Victims of other gender identities

After discussing their experiences and understandings of male and female victims, respondents were provided with the opportunity to discuss any details about their work (if any), with young people of other genders. Only 15 participants answered this question, six of whom did so to indicate that they had no such experience. The remaining responses provided minimal detail, but commonly indicated working with one or two individuals throughout their career. Three participants indicated seeing as many as 1-2 non-binary clients in a month. Another simply comments, "We are open to any kind of case. But we have not yet received any case related to a non-binary person." (R246).

One participant explained that Pakistani norms and expectations may limit the visibility of such young people, noting "Most children in Pakistan are not usually aware that they can choose not to identify as [a] binary [gender]" (R358). Another participant acknowledged that these young people are vulnerable to CSEA: "Males abuse [non-binary people] by giving or promising them money." (R367)

TYPES OF SEXUAL EXPLOITATION OBSERVED

Participants were asked to think separately about the boys and girls who they supported, and indicate different forms of sexual exploitation abuse they encountered.

For girl clients:

- 19% had direct experience with girls who had been groomed for sexual purposes.
- 21% had direct experience with girls who had been involved in self-generated sexual content.
- More than a fourth (28%) had worked directly with girls who had been exploited in child sexual abuse material.
- 28% had direct experience with girls who had been trafficked for sexual purposes.
- Seven support workers had direct experience with girls who had been exploited through live-streaming of sexual exploitation.

For boy clients:

- 22% had direct experience with boys who had been groomed for sexual purposes.
- 22% had direct experience with boys who had been involved in self-generated sexual content.
- 29% had worked directly with boys who had been exploited in child sexual abuse material.
- 27% had direct experience with boys who had been trafficked for sexual purposes.
- Six support workers had direct experience with boys who had been exploited through live-streaming of sexual exploitation.

Presenting factors for boys and girls

We know that young people who have been subjected to sexual exploitation don't always seek help by starting out with a disclosure – they may seek help for other reasons and then disclose once a trusting relationship with the helper is ensured. Thus, respondents were asked what issues boys and girls presented with when seeking help. Many cases involving both boys and girls were commonly referred for various forms of neglect, as well as emotional or behavioural issues, such as self-harm, getting into fights, or missing school, descriptions of presenting issues for boys were notably more violent and extreme. Similarly, while support workers described economic factors, such as poverty or illiteracy, as presenting issues for both boys and girls, factors for boys also included child and forced labor, as well as related physical and emotional violence.

Emotional issues were prominent, and included anger and anxiety, as well as disturbances to boys' sleep or studies. One participant described that “[boys have] anger issues. [They may] feel the sudden urge to throw things in anger or beat their other younger siblings in a fight. [They have] low moods and low confidence...[and] lack interest in their studies.” (R358)

Economic issues, such as poverty and labor exploitation were also prominently described as presenting issues for boys. More than half of those who described economic issues, described forced labor, and often its resulting injuries. One described, “most community boys work in workshops, where they may face [child] protection issues. [They need] protection from the people, machines, and tools, which may hurt them. They can't fully give time to [their] education.” (R423) Some respondents described boys commonly being referred for various behavioural issues, such as running away from home, bullying, and getting into fights. Others implied that CSEA had already been identified before meeting some boy clients: “the majority of the boys [I work with] have been sexually abused, some were from [existing] sexual exploitation cases. They were afraid, ashamed, and were emotionally disturbed.” (R246)

Half of respondents described girls referred for various forms of sexual abuse, including rape and incest, and “harassment” – aligning with earlier data related to relatives as offenders: “through [the girls'] guardians, we come to know that they are facing sexual abuse, most of the time [this happens] at home by their relatives.” (R114) Among these responses, many described girls who actively seek support for their experiences,

even though CSEA may not be immediately disclosed: *“While I give group-based psychosocial counselling, girls approach me and tell me they have something to discuss regarding what they have experienced, currently or in the past. Once rapport is built and the girls begin trusting me, they talk about how they’ve been sexually exploited.”* (R368)

Emotional issues, sleep disturbances, depression and anxiety were also described for girls: *“they are emotionally disturbed. Their families need counselling [because] they fear for the girl’s honour. They mostly hide the incident [of CSEA].”* (R246) To a lesser extent, economic issues, poverty and illiteracy, and behavioural issues like self-harm and violence did also arise.

Victim identification challenges

Finally in this section, we asked respondents to note challenges they observed in establishing whether a child may be experiencing sexual exploitation. For both boys and girls, support workers described considerable reluctance and fear in disclosing abuse, focusing largely on social stigmas and repercussions for being identified as a victim of CSEA. They also described various communication issues which make it difficult to know if the child has experienced CSEA. These include depersonalization (e.g., ‘I know someone who was abused, but it’s not me’), doublespeak, or allusions to experiences of CSEA, which stop short or deny that anything happened. One participant observed,

“Due to the cultural context, it’s still a stigma for girls and boys to speak for themselves. Mostly, adults or the exploiters [themselves] are closely related to the victim. [Such as a] relative or family friend, therefore standing against them becomes [a risk] for the victim. These challenges make it difficult for girls or boys victimized of sexual exploitation and abuse to verbalize what they have experienced.” (R368)

Discomfort discussing sex and sexuality are described as creating an important challenge to victim identification. As one support worker commented,

“Sex is a taboo topic in Pakistan, and sexual exploitation is perceived as a permanent loss of respect, which is why victims do not easily open up. It takes a lot of sessions and a lot of reassurance of privacy [and] confidentiality before the client [is] eventually [able to] open up about it.” (R483)

Despite the similarities between boys and girls, notable qualitative differences emerge, with support workers describing additional struggles in building rapport with boys, and identifying sexual traumas amidst numerous other intersecting traumas. This is especially relevant among boys who are working within exploitative or high-risk environments, such as those living or working on the street. One participant noted that *“sexual exploitation is high among street children and children at work, especially in the motor workshops... [many are] harassed by the Mechanics and molvi (religious teachers) if they refuse to cooperate in meeting their desire for sex.”* (R318).

Others highlighted the impact of the physical and psychological environments where boys that they work with live: *“[boys] are very disturbed about [the experience of CSEA]. Even though they don’t want to talk [about it], ...after probing, they describe very miserable psychological and physical conditions. Their minds [are] totally damaged by these incidents. It’s very difficult for me to [describe it] in specific words.”* (R157)

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.

“Kashif”

“19-year-old Shahid pays a 17-year-old cousin, Kashif, to undress while filming. Kashif agrees to do it without concerns.”

Seventy percent of participants agreed that Kashif had been sexually exploited, with 22% judging that Kashif was not a victim and another five uncertain.

“Shahid 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, 79% were clear that Shahid had committed sexual exploitation, however nine believed he had not done wrong and four were uncertain.

“Farid, who does not know Shahid or Kashif, finds and watches the video online from home elsewhere in the country.”

Given this information, only 67% of participants responded that this viewing of CSAM was sexual exploitation. Twenty-two percent did not believe viewing CSAM was problematic and seven respondents were unsure.

The ‘practical steps’ or immediate responses suggested by support workers were diverse and tended to focus on Kashif rather than the offender, yet were still quite punitive in nature. Many responses focused on correcting and educating Kashif for his ‘bad’ behaviour. One noted, *“Kashif [should be] informed that it is wrong”* (R99) and another asserted that *“I will educate him that being undressed in front of anyone is not good and acceptable by society.”* (R167) Another similarly suggests education and correction of the victim, with the involvement of the parents: *“Kashif should have been educated regarding what is right in these circumstances and how one should behave. He should be informed about consent and the features of it. Since he was underage, his parents/guardians must be involved to deal with the matter.”* (R317)

Other responses seem to emphasize the child’s apparent willingness to be filmed and appear to reflect a lack of understanding of how children may be coerced: *“I see [that in the] the first line [of the story] he is doing it without any concern, so it seems that he is doing it by his [own] will. We can contact him for counselling and psycho-educate him about [sexual] addiction.”* (R157) Additionally, several responses also focused on the provision of psychological counselling but this is centred on ‘teaching’ the victim, rather than supporting him for the abuse at the hands of an adult: *“Kashif needs psychological counselling as he does not understand that he is harming himself by doing these things for money.”* (R248)

In contrast, supportive responses are also notable amongst the responses: *“provide unconditional positive regard, build rapport, and then gradually, over the sessions, discuss the incident and the reasons why he agreed to it. These reasons would then be treated further.”* (R483) Another similarly notes, *“[I would] help him to take action bravely, and not to panic.”* (R478)

Legal responses were also common, including calling for the arrest of Shahid: *“Pakistan also has strict cyber laws which would definitely make Shahid pay in the form of punishment. Next, I will inform Kashif to never expose himself. This, and if he needs any counselling, I will refer him to a psychologist.”* (R368) Only about a third of responses noted actions to remove or flag the CSAM.

“Afzal”

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

Seventy-one percent agreed that Afzal had been exploited, yet 22% said that he had not been exploited, and five participants were uncertain.

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

The majority of participants (86%) now believed that the uncle had committed sexual exploitation, although ten still held that he had not committed sexual exploitation, and four were uncertain.

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

The majority of support workers (76%) believed that Afzal’s mother was responsible for facilitating sexual exploitation, but 11% believed that she was not to blame (and five remained uncertain).

Many of the support worker’s practical responses to this scenario focused on correcting or educating Afzal about the difference between ‘good touch’ and ‘bad touch’⁴¹ and counselling the mother about child protection. Some participants suggested legal responses targeting Sajid as well as a few responses that suggested removal of the child from the care of the mother: *“I would have taken Afzal out of there since mother was equally a part of the exploitation. I would have taken him to a secure place.”* (R317)

“Mukhtar”

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

Eighty-five percent of participants said that Mukhtar had experienced sexual exploitation. While the act of touching an arm while chatting may not constitute sexual exploitation, there is a clear suggestion from the situation that Parveen is misusing her position of power. Respondents may be identifying this as grooming behaviour in the scenario, which is a positive sign.

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

In this clearer situation, more support workers (89%) believed that Mukhtar had been exploited though six still held that he hadn’t, and one was uncertain.

Many of the ‘practical steps’ focused on offering protection and providing education and awareness to Mukhtar on *“his bodily rights”* (R318), and training on *“good touch and bad touch”* (R145) and to have the *“courage to refuse”* (R274) the woman’s attempted child sexual exploitation:

“I would have provided Mukhtar with the awareness that it is not right for Parveen to touch the child and to stop the advances of the lady. And if we find the situation alarming, we can get Parveen arrested and remove the child from the exploitative environment.” (R246)

Throughout the responses, many suggestions similarly focus on correcting Mukhtar, placing the responsibility with him: *“I would like to [help him] realize his mistake.”* (R166)

41 It should be noted that while popular, education regarding sexual abuse has moved away from this older terminology of ‘good and bad touch’. It has been noted that children may internalise the ‘bad’ as a judgement of themselves. Terminology that educates children about control over their bodies or ‘bodily autonomy’ is preferred. A good example can be seen in NSPCC’s Talk PANTS with Pantosaurus. PAHCHAAN has translated one of the songs of ‘My body is my body’ by Chrissy Sykes.

“Majid”

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

Seventy-two percent of workers correctly identified Majid as a victim of sexual exploitation, although nearly a third did not. Considering “the men” that Majid meets on the weekends, these responses are similar in number to those who found Majid to have been exploited. While two-thirds of support workers (72%) correctly identified the men as exploiters, 28% did not, with 14 believing the men were not exploiters and three who were uncertain.

With nearly a third of support workers indicating that Majid had not experienced sexual exploitation, the practical responses to this scenario are somewhat limited, with some indicating that no action needs to be taken. One participant says: *“counselling if he wanted it, because you can't give counselling until unless the victim asked for it.”* (R157). Another simply states, *“if he does it with his consent there is no sexual exploitation.”* (R248)

Conversely, others noted the need to intervene: *“Majid is still a child and the adults involved are responsible for [not] refusing Majid. So, in this case sex education [should] be provided to Majid thorough practical responses.”* (358) Another provides a more thorough response and comments of the scenario:

“As Majid is a minor and he is being paid for the sexual encounters, it is sexual exploitation. It needs to stop immediately. We will do our best to make Majid realize that it is a crime and comes within the domain of sexual exploitation. [While]

he can have boyfriends and can have relationships when he is older and above 18 years old, right now Majid needs help. The alleged ‘boyfriends’ of the child shall also be stopped and should be realized for their wrongdoings. If the situation becomes threatening or dangerous for Majid, the police shall be involved in the case.” (R246)

“Hamid”

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

Eighty-three percent of participants correctly identified Hamid as a victim of sexual exploitation, though 16% held that Hamid had not been exploited.

“On one occasion, Hamid was arrested for prostitution and intends to plead guilty. “

Seventy-nine percent of participants correctly identified that the men and women that Hamid met for sex had committed sexual exploitation.

Practical responses centred on the provision of legal support and providing livelihood help and safe shelter: *“A sex worker's⁴² earning is an easy [method of] money-making in Pakistan. I would definitely ask the child to refrain from such activities immediately and apply for free vocational training centres where they also provide opportunities to work in future.”* (R481) Other participants demonstrated the need to communicate acceptance and supporting psychological needs alongside practical considerations:

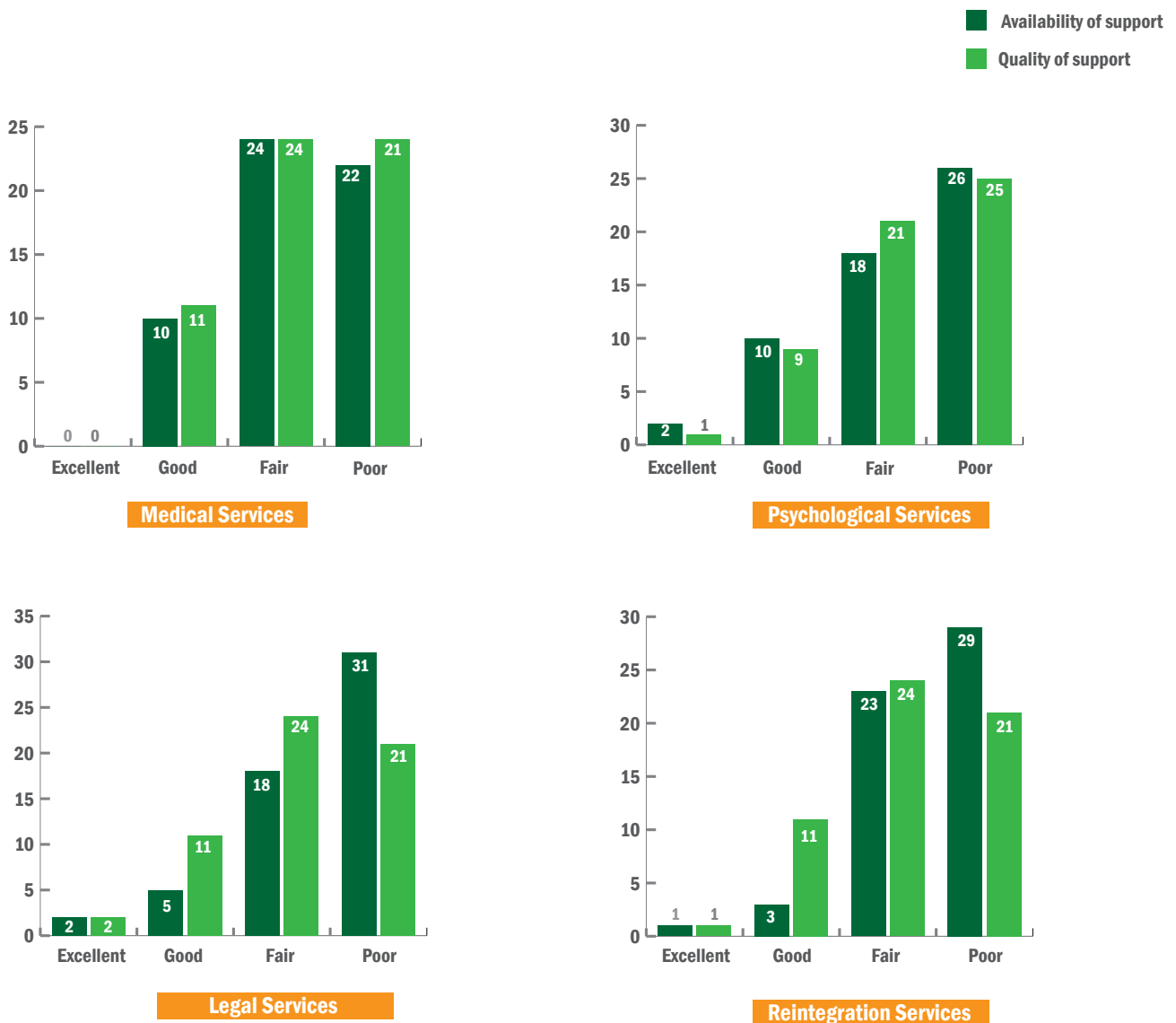
42 The term “sex worker”, used by the respondent, is frequently used to refer to adults, but the terms “sex work” and “sex worker” should never be used to refer to children sexually exploited through prostitution, since they could imply that this is a legitimate occupation for a child, or shift the blame onto the child. For further information, please consult the [Terminology Guidelines for the Protection of Children from Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse](#). Interagency Working Group on Sexual Exploitation of Children. (2016, January 28).

“Hameed’s immediate need is his safety, shelter, and rehabilitation. [We] will provide legal support to Hameed for his bail and later will provide shelter and safety to Hameed. I will also provide Hameed with required education and skills so he could be able to earn for himself after he is above 18. I will try to contact the family of Hameed and try my best to make them aware that Hameed is normal, it is not a bad thing to be transgender. They need the right education for acceptance.” (R246)

PERSPECTIVES OF SUPPORT SERVICES

Support workers were asked to rate both the availability and quality of existing services in Pakistan for boys who have experienced sexual abuse or exploitation. Figure 7 shows that respondents judged both the availability and quality of services as fair or poor.

Figure 7. Availability and quality of existing support services in Pakistan.



QUALITY CONSTRAINTS ON SERVICES FOR BOYS

Support workers were asked to reflect on why the quality of services was low. Most commonly, general underdevelopment of social support systems, policies and procedures. They noted competing interests and under-prepared support workers in government and non-government organizations: “[there are] many different interests in such organizations and incompetent staff” (R156) and another similarly remarked, “the government is too busy in other affairs.” Additional responses note “a lack of services, facilitation, funding, and infrastructure for the victims of abuse” (R246) and “a lack of policy making and implementation on child rights and protection.” (R466)

Many described the impact of social and gender norms, and hesitancy on issues of sex involving children. Several indicated that sexual exploitation of boys is not seen as a child protection issue, thus is not prioritised in services: “Because boys are considered to be strong and independent, they are left to fend for themselves-- even if they complain [that] they are in danger.” (R358) Another indicated that little progress can be made on the issue of CSEA of boys, until society is willing to consider it a problem, also implying that greater recognition may have serious resource implications. They commented that, “...when society considers this act [CSEA of boys] as a crime. [Then the] poor medical, legal, and reintegration services will add [boys to their] number of sexual [exploitation] victims.” (R318)

Overcoming quality constraints

Suggested responses for overcoming these quality constraints focused largely on social and institutional development and expanding public awareness that boys may be subjected to sexual abuse and exploitation. Others expressed

the importance of integrating the values of child protection of boys into Islamic values and communicating these principles, for example through public media campaigns: “run a media campaign about [child] rights to show Islamic and religious points for [children’s] rights.” (R145)

Finally, in relation to the issue of sexual exploitation of boys, more human resources, and knowledge and skill development amongst practitioners is needed:

“[There is a need for] better tools to be used while hiring and recruiting of staff and persons dealing with child sexual abuse or exploitation. Training, capacity building of staff and service providers through international and national professionals [is needed] to deal with child sexual exploitation cases.” (R368)

VULNERABILITY FACTORS IMPACTING BOYS

Participants 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 Pakistan. 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.

Traditional beliefs and practices as vulnerabilities

The majority of respondents (65%) believed that stigma and shame were key vulnerability factors for boys. Specifically, gendered beliefs were also high on the list with ‘beliefs that boys are strong, not vulnerable, and able to protect themselves’ the third most commonly cited vulnerability.

Figure 8. Top traditional beliefs and practices as vulnerabilities.

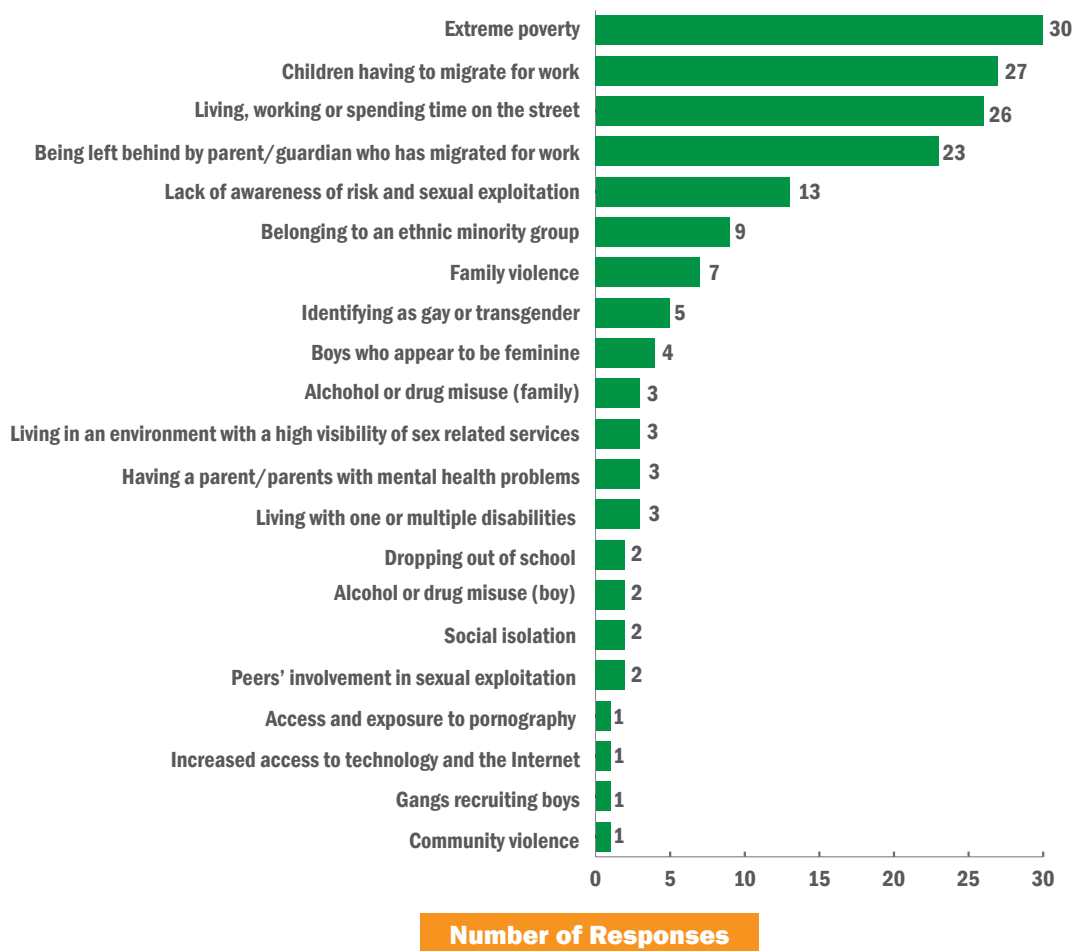


Social and economic vulnerabilities

The top four factors were related to economic hardships with ‘extreme poverty’ topping the list as a vulnerability for boys to sexual exploitation. The other factors on this list differed – and were related to awareness of risk.

“Because boys are considered to be strong and independent, they are left to fend for themselves--even if they complain [that] they are in danger.” (R358)

Figure 9. Top social and economic factors as vulnerabilities.



Addressing key vulnerabilities in practice

Respondents consistently described the challenges posed by social and gender norms surrounding sex and sexuality. When children do not have the information they need, this empowers offenders to take advantage. Ways of ensuring children have access to age-appropriate information was common. Interventions that targeted some social norms, and that raise awareness were suggested. This included forms of ‘life-skills’ education, information on sex, self-protection, and bodily rights. One participant summarised nicely:

“Awareness. Boys are considered strong and independent and the shame of [CSEA] that occurs with them has a lot to do with the cultural context of Pakistan. Boys are usually shunned if they are ever sexually exploited. [There is] no proper sex education [or] life-skills based education and parents are ignorant towards providing their child with [the] right education regarding his sexual rights and the protection of those rights. [This] enhances the chance for a boy to be sexually exploited and never talk about it.” (R368)

Some reflect on some of their own work in attempting to bridge the awareness gap when it comes to the bodily rights of children - and where boys are concerned, helping them understand the importance of identifying and sharing their feelings related to important life events:

“Life-skills based education tackles the sex education part, where age-appropriate information is provided to children. We conduct informative lectures in schools... to increase awareness regarding sexual abuse and the rights of children. Moreover, lectures with boys focus on the part where expressions of feelings such as grief, shame, helplessness are talked about.” (R358)

Another worker made similar points but in regards to empowering caregivers in this support and these discussions with children:

“Parents should have a positive relationship with their children [so that their children] can share anything without hesitation and [the parent can] keep an eye on their children and their social circle. In our society, lack of sexual awareness or harassment, good and bad touch, and lack of psychological treatment leads to more sexual exploitation. Parents should accept their children as they are, and not compare them with others. We should accept people as they are, positively, without any kind of discrimination.” (R210)

Others note broader needs to address the underpinning economic realities, of extreme poverty and children exploited for work and the provision of resources for struggling parents within this context. Participants also reflected on the additional challenges faced by the children of economic migrants or those who must be away from home, illustrating the linkages between lack of supervision, and increased vulnerability: *“...boys [are] easily exploited as they are more exposed to being [left] alone in the community and at home.”* (R481) Some noted the need to normalize vulnerabilities of men and boys, with one commenting on the need to “prove that men are not strong, [that] they are [as] emotional and weak as women.” (R478)

Finally, several participants described the importance of addressing institutional issues, including the need for improved legal protections, better implemented laws, and awareness-raising of existing child protection legislation.

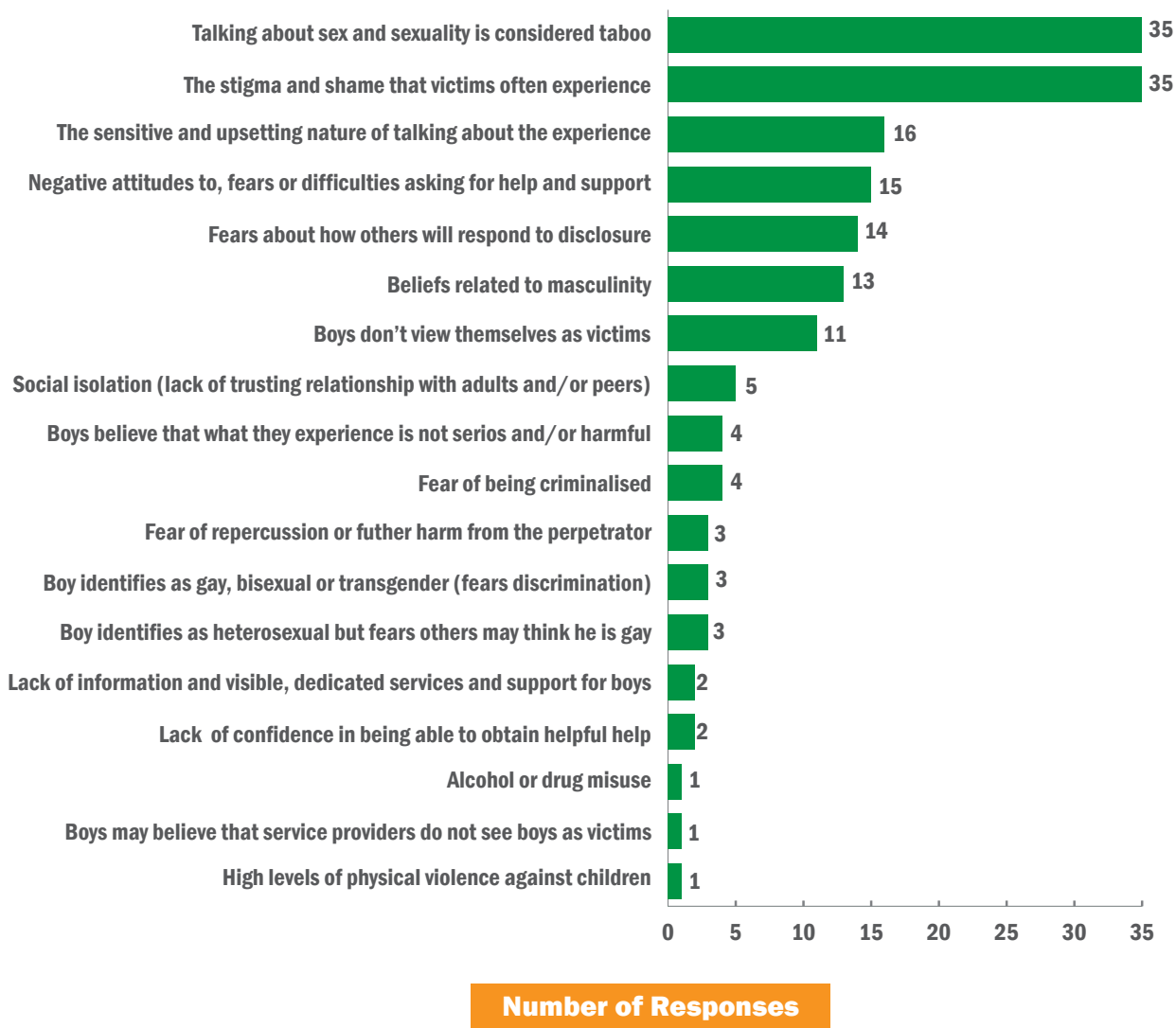
BARRIERS TO BOYS’ DISCLOSURES

Support workers were asked to identify barriers to boys’ disclosures from a list developed from the research literature. Figure 10 shows that many responses were focused on social and gender norms surrounding sex and sexuality and stigmatisation related to being a victim of sexual violence. Fifty-six percent identified ‘stigma and shame that victims experience’ as a top barrier that keeps boys silent about their experiences of

CSEA. Interestingly, this response was indicated almost twice as frequently amongst male support workers as it was amongst female support workers (70% and 40%, respectively). The same proportion of participants (56%) highlighted taboos related to sex and sexuality as a major

barrier to disclosure. Next on the list were ‘the sensitive and upsetting nature of talking about experiences’ and ‘negative attitudes, fears, or difficulties’ experienced by boys related to asking for help. Fear of being blamed, punished, or mocked were also evident.

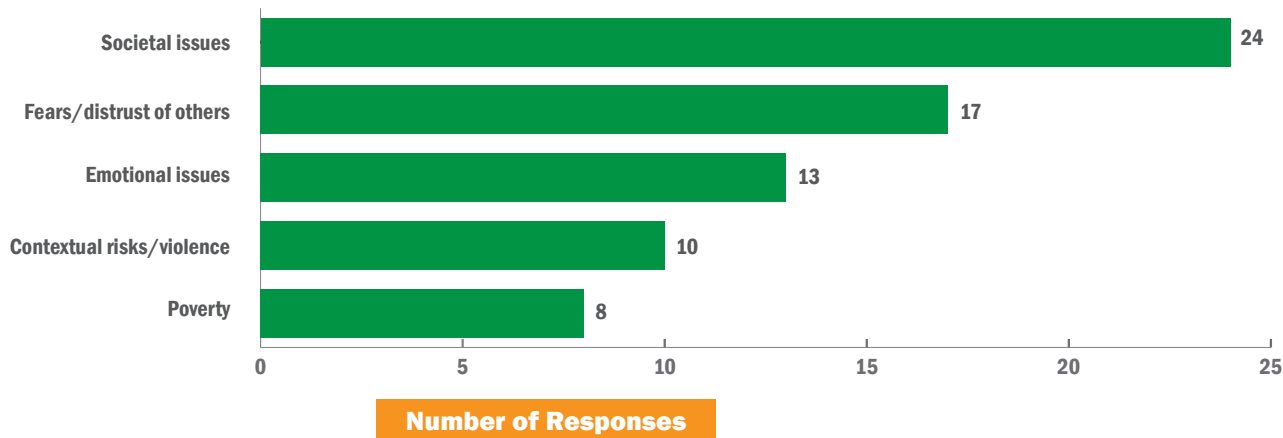
Figure 10. Barriers for boys to disclosing sexual exploitation.



Most serious problems

Responses to a question asking frontline support workers to summarise “what boys tell you are the most serious problems that they faced” are categorised and depicted in Figure 11.

Figure 11. Most significant problems for boys seeking help.



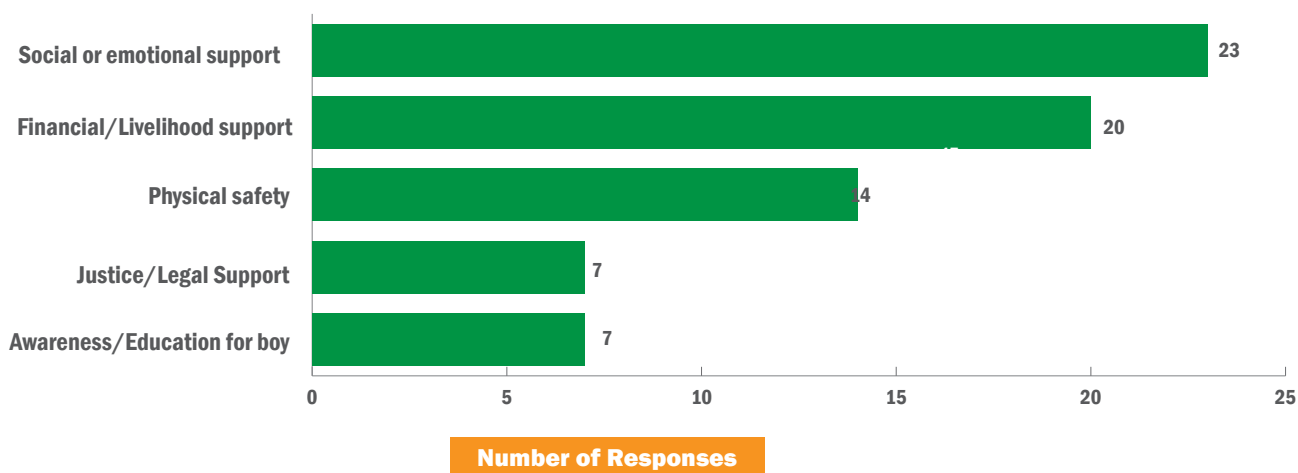
These fall into five loose categories:

- **Social issues:** One support worker described how a range of social and economic factors, including gender norms, both increase vulnerability and normalize the abuse and exploitation of boys, “*this issue is not being [considered] as sexual exploitation. [Because there is] unawareness of child rights. [The boys] learn to live with [the exploitation] because their parents and guardians send them for work, where they remain unguarded.*” (R368) After experiencing CSEA, many describe gender-related fears of stigma and rejection and that their experiences may have serious consequences for future relationships. One commented, “*They believe they [will lose] their masculinity. They believe that they [will] have sexual disorders.*” (R209)
- **Fear or distrust:** Support workers commonly described a variety of fears and an isolating sense of distrust toward other people as a critical problem for the boys they worked with. These fears are commonly related to stigma attached to their victimization that prevent them from seeking help to address their issues. Some fears were related to physical safety and the potential for ongoing abuse: “*[Boys] fear being harmed and tortured. [They are] not accepted by society and fear [being stigmatized].*” (R166)
- **Mental health:** These included anxiety, symptoms of PTSD, and feelings of anger or revenge towards offenders, as well as self-blame arising from feeling they did not live up to unreasonable gender norms framing that males are able to protect themselves. Some support workers also noted sexual issues and fears that they will no longer “*be able to enjoy sex again in life when they grow up*” (R318) and that “*they [won’t be able to] have sex with their [future] wife.*” (R209)
- **Violence and risk:** This included intra-familial abuse, fears of repercussions from disclosing, as well as fears of criminalization, police or other authority figures – particularly for street-connected boys. One respondent described facilitation of CSEA by family members noting “*[the boys] cousins trained them for sexual [exploitation]*” (R318).
- **Poverty:** Many of the issues in other categories have intersections with this theme also, however, these responses specifically noted labor exploitation and other unequal power relationships brought on by poverty that related to the sexual exploitation boys were subjected to.

Most serious needs

Support workers were then asked to consider the most significant needs that boys say that they have, depicted in Figure 12 below.

Figure 12. Most significant needs of boys seeking help.



Responses fell into three categories:

- **Emotional support:** These responses included psychological treatment for trauma: *“depression and suicidal ideas”* (R157), as well as informal counselling, and broader needs for boys *“to be heard and understood”* (R317). Other responses noted support for the weight of *“keeping [the abuse] a secret”* (R403) as well as *“moral support...[and] the removal of [their] guilty feelings.”* (R466). These responses reflected a broader appeal for social acceptance by boys, often drawing attention to common public disregard for street-connected boys and survivors of sexual exploitation.
- **Economic or livelihood support:** The need for financial or livelihood support to assist families in relieving conditions which may impact vulnerability of boys (such as push factors for child labor) were noted here. One responded explained that many of the boys they worked with *“want to quit [the working conditions which lead to CSEA] but the boy’s family need to be empowered.”* (R250) Another said; *“[boys need] monetary support so they don’t have to get into child labor”* (R368).
- **Physical safety:** Workers noted *“safe shelter”* (R403), and *“a safe place to stay in case that information [of the abuse] gets out.”* (R358) Another noted safety was a key need for boys affected by labor exploitation, highlighting the need for proactive interventions, including *“regular checks by law and enforcement agencies to protect the boys and NGOs [should conduct] mappings of out-of-school boys in the community.”* (R368).

ANALYSIS OF LEGAL FRAMEWORK

CHILDREN'S RIGHTS UNDER PAKISTAN'S LAW

To ensure its compliance with its international obligations, Pakistan has adopted numerous laws aimed at safeguarding the rights of children and protecting them from abuse, exploitation, and violence. In 2016, the Criminal Law (Amendment) Act, 2016 (Act X of 2016) was passed, which amended the Pakistan Penal Code of 1860, and the Code of Criminal Procedure of 1898.⁴³ The Act is significant as it strengthened the protection afforded to children by introducing offences, including those relating to child abuse, child cruelty, seduction, trafficking, and child sexual abuse material.⁴⁴ Other national laws relevant to the sexual exploitation of children include the Juvenile Justice System Act, 2018; Zainab Alert Response and Recovery Act, 2020; Prevention of Trafficking in Persons Act, 2018; National Commission on Rights of Children Act, 2017; and the Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act, 2016. Pakistan has also adopted some child-centric laws at the provincial level, namely the Punjab Destitute Neglected Children Act, 2004; the Islamabad Capital Territory Child Protection Act, 2018; the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Child Protection and Welfare Act, 2010; and the Baluchistan Child Protection Act, 2016.

To ensure the rights of all children below the age of 18 years and to define the scope of protection,

it is important that national legislation adopts a uniform legal definition of the term 'child' in line with international standards,⁴⁵ to be consistently used across different laws.⁴⁶ This is unfortunately not the case in Pakistan, as different laws apply contrasting definitions, leading to ambiguities in application. Some laws such as the Juvenile Justice System Act, 2018,⁴⁷ Section 2(a) Prevention of Trafficking in Persons Act, 2018,⁴⁸ Zainab Alert Response and Recovery Act, 2020,⁴⁹ Anti-Rape (Investigation and Trial) Act, 2021,⁵⁰ and National Commission on Rights of Children 2017⁵¹ define a 'child' as a person below the age of 18 years. The Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act, 2016 uses the term "minor" to refer to persons below the age of 18 years.⁵² Conversely the Penal Code, which covers offences relating to SEC more comprehensively, does not define the term 'child' and uses the term 'minor' inconsistently under various sections.⁵³ The inconsistencies relating to the definition of a 'child' also exist under the provincial laws. In the Punjab province, the Punjab Destitute and Neglected Children Act, 2004 defines a 'child' as a person below the age of 18 years,⁵⁴ the Punjab Restriction on Employment of Children Act, 2016 defines a 'child' as a person who is under the age of 15 years and adolescent as a person aged 15-18.⁵⁵

Prior to the passing of the Criminal Law (Amendment) Ordinance in 2020, then passed by the legislature as the Criminal Laws (Amendment) Act 2021, one of the major legislative issues

43 Government of Pakistan. (2016). [Criminal Law Amendment Act \(No. X of 2016\)](#).

44 The Criminal Law Amendment Act introduced the following sections in the Penal Code: Section 292-A: Exposure to Seduction; Section 292-B: Child Pornography; Section 292-C: Punishment for Child Pornography; Section 328-A: Cruelty to a Child; Section 369-A: Trafficking of Human Beings (repealed); Section 377-A: Child Abuse and Section 377-B: Punishment for Child Abuse.

45 In line with most international legal instruments and with international practice, the participating organizations advise that the term "child" be understood as including any person who is under the age of 18 years. [Terminology Guidelines for the Protection of Children from Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse](#). 6.

46 Interagency Working Group on Sexual Exploitation of Children. (2016). [Terminology Guidelines for the Protection of Children from Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse](#).

47 Government of Pakistan. (2018). [Juvenile Justice System Act, 2018](#), Section 2(b).

48 Government of Pakistan. (2018). [Prevention of Trafficking in Persons Act, 2018](#), Section 2(a).

49 Government of Pakistan. (2020). [Zainab Alert, Response and Recovery Act \(No. XV of 2020\)](#), Section 2(g).

50 Government of Pakistan. (2021). [Anti-Rape \(Investigation and Trial\) Act, 2021](#), Section 2(1)(b).

51 Government of Pakistan. (2017). [National Commission on Rights of Children, 2017](#), Section 2-b.

52 Government of Pakistan. (2016). [Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act, 2016](#), Section 2(1)(xxiv).

53 Government of Pakistan. (1860). [Pakistan Penal Code \(Act No. XLV of 1860\)](#), Sections 292B; 361; 366A, etc.

54 Government of Punjab. (2004). [Punjab Destitute and Neglected Children Act, 2004](#), Section 3(1)(e).

55 Government of Punjab. (2016). [Punjab Restriction on Employment of Children Act, 2016](#), Section 2-C.

regarding the protection of boys in Pakistan was the lack of a gender-neutral definition of rape. As of 2020, Section 375 of the Penal Code -which previously only recognised rape of women- was amended to include a gender neutral definition of rape, where the term person explicitly covers males, females and transgender people,⁵⁶ and also establishes 16 years as the age of consent for children of any gender.⁵⁷ The amendment defines consent as “an unequivocal voluntary agreement when B [one party] by words, gestures or any other form of verbal or non-verbal communication, communicates willingness to participate in the specific sexual act”,⁵⁸ and makes it clear that not physically resisting the act of penetration does not automatically amount to consent.⁵⁹

One of the challenges with the national legislation that remains despite the amendment, is the lack of any close-in-age exemption,⁶⁰ or any criteria to determine whether consent between peers was voluntary, well-informed, and mutual. When compounded with the general prohibition of sexual relations outside of marriage.⁶¹ This could result in minor children aged 10-18 being penalised for engaging in consensual intercourse.⁶²

A further inconsistency is that the legal age of working in Pakistan has been established under federal and provincial laws separately. In the provinces of Sindh,⁶³ Khyber Pakhtunkhwa⁶⁴ Islamabad Capital Territory, and Balochistan it

is 14 years of age.⁶⁵ Punjab is the only province where the legal working age under the main labor law is 15,⁶⁶ although under Punjab’s special law on child labor in brick kilns, the legal working age is 14 years.⁶⁷ Positively, the legal working ages are the same for boys and girls throughout the country. Additionally, the Constitution of Pakistan prohibits the employment of children below the age of 14 in any factory, mine, or hazardous employment.⁶⁸ Consequently, the minimum age for hazardous employment is 14 at the federal level as well as in Balochistan⁶⁹ and 18 in the other provinces,⁷⁰ with the schedules attached to the federal and provincial laws specifying the hazardous works prohibited for children.

The Constitution of Pakistan entitles all children aged 5-16 years the right to free and compulsory schooling under Article 25-A of the Constitution of Pakistan. This has been enshrined under the Right to Free and Compulsory Education Act at Federal level.⁷¹ At provincial level, the Punjab Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2014;⁷² the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Free Compulsory Primary Secondary Education Act, 2017;⁷³ the Balochistan Compulsory Education Act, 2014⁷⁴ and the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2014,⁷⁵ of the Sindh province ensures this right.

There is arguably a conflict between the legal age of work and the compulsory age of schooling, as the legal working age has been set below the compulsory age of schooling. As a result, this

56 Government of Pakistan. (2021). *Criminal Laws (Amendment) Act 2021*, Section 2.

57 *Ibid.*

58 *Ibid.*

59 *Ibid.*

60 Close in age exemptions allow consensual sexual activity between persons who are significantly close in age to each other, and one or both partners are below the age of consent.

61 Government of Pakistan. (1860). *Pakistan Penal Code (Act No. XLV of 1860)*, Section 496B.

62 The Penal Code sets the age of criminal responsibility at 10 years. From the age of 10-14, the judge while considering maturity level of the offender will decide whether he/she should be held criminally responsible or not. After the age of 14, everyone is responsible for all his/her criminal actions.

63 Government of Sindh. (2017). *Sindh prohibition of employment of children Act, 2017*, Section 2(ii).

64 Government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. (2015). *Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Prohibition of Employment of Children Act*, Section 2(b).

65 Government of Pakistan. (1991). *Employment of Children Act, 1991*, Section 2(iii).

66 Government of Punjab. (2016). *Punjab Restriction on Employment of Children Act, 2016*, Section 2(c).

67 Government of Punjab. (2016). *Punjab Prohibition of Child Labor at Brick Kilns Act 2016*, Section 2(e).

68 Government of Pakistan. (1973). *The Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan*, Article 11(3).

69 Government of Pakistan. (1991). *Employment of Children Act, 1991*, Sections 2-3.

70 Government of Sindh. (2017). *Sindh prohibition of employment of children Act, 2017*, Section 3(2); Government of Punjab. (2016). *Punjab Restriction on Employment of Children Act, 2016*, Section 3(2); Government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. (2015). *Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Prohibition of Employment of Children Act*, Section 2(1)(a) and Section 3(2).

71 Government of Pakistan. (2012). *The Right to Free and Compulsory Education Act (No. XXIV of 2012)*, Section 3 read with Section 2(c).

72 Government of Punjab. (2014). *Punjab Free and Compulsory Education Act (No. XXVI of 2014)*, Section 3.

73 Government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. (2017). *Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Free Compulsory Primary Secondary Education Act (No. XII of 2017)*, Section 3.

74 Government of Balochistan. (2014). *Balochistan Compulsory Education Act (No. V of 2014)*, Section 3.

75 Government of Sindh. (2013). *Sindh Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act (Act No. XIV of 2013)*, Section 3(1).

may contribute to some children dropping out of school to earn their livelihood.⁷⁶

WHY BOYS NEED SPECIFIC AND TAILORED MEASURES

Although all children are affected by sexual exploitation, research has tended to focus heavily on girls,⁷⁷ due to the perception that girls tend to be more vulnerable to sexual exploitation. Despite this focus, there is a growing body of research that shows that male victims of sexual exploitation are prevalent,⁷⁸ emphasising the need to focus further research, policy, and legislation on children of all genders. Through this research, we seek to strike a balance in the data and gather as much knowledge about the protection of boys from sexual exploitation as we have about the protection of girls.

Another important and progressive piece of legislation worth of mention is the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act, 2018, which although not specific to children, legally protects the rights of transgender people and prohibits discrimination and violence against them.⁷⁹

While incidents of sexual exploitation of boys appear to be high, current legal provision tends not to treat girls and boys equally. Although the current substantive laws on rape in Pakistan use a non-gendered definition of rape, some provisions of the Penal Code exclusively protect girls. These include Sections 366A and 366B which limit the criminalization of procurement for prostitution to girls only.⁸⁰ In addition, homosexual relations are criminalized in Pakistan under Section 377 of the Penal Code,⁸¹ contributing to and legitimising the stigma that surrounds homosexuality. This provision could potentially place boy victims of sexual exploitation in danger, as they are not explicitly exempted from taking

part in homosexual relations in the context of an exploitative situation and may be treated as offenders instead of victims. The stigma surrounding exploitation and abuse, combined with the fear of prosecution is likely to contribute to a reluctance for boys to report sexual offences against them.⁸² This inherent legal bias could also result in differential treatment being afforded to boy victims of rape or other offences of sexual exploitation, in terms of support services.

It is with these vulnerabilities in mind that the present research seeks to assess how boys are afforded protection within the legal system of Pakistan. Each of the sections below will analyse the legislation relevant to each of the contexts in which SEC can occur and, where relevant, highlights any provisions that may have special significance for boys. Where possible, we attempt to shine a light on how the protections enshrined in law are reflected in their practical implementation.

EXPLOITATION OF CHILDREN IN PROSTITUTION

With the growing evidence on the matter, it is increasingly being recognized that like girls, boys are also affected by exploitation in prostitution in several settings.⁸³ The 2021 US Department of State's Trafficking in Persons Report identified the existence of sexual exploitation of boys in a coal mining community in Balochistan,⁸⁴ involving adult coal miners of this community sexually abusing and exploiting young boys who are often brought from afar for this sole purpose. Media reports also reveal how adverse circumstances often force these boys to be exploited in transactional sex.⁸⁵ Against this backdrop, we seek to assess the effectiveness of the Pakistani legislation to combat the exploitation of children,

76 US Department of Labor. (2019). *2019 Findings on the Worst Forms of Labor: Pakistan*, 7.

77 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

78 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).

79 Government of Pakistan. (2018). *Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act, 2018*.

80 Government of Pakistan. (1860). *Pakistan Penal Code (Act No. XLV of 1860)*, Sections 366A and 366B.

81 *Ibid.*

82 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).

83 ECPAT International. (2020). *Summary Paper: Exploitation of Children in Prostitution*. 8.

84 US Department of State. (2021). *2021 Trafficking in Persons Report: Pakistan*.

85 The Dawn. (2019). *Shahrag, the Pakistani town where boys aren't safe from men*.

particularly boys, in prostitution.

The Constitution of Pakistan treats prostitution as a “social evil” and directs the government to prevent it.⁸⁶ Hence, prostitution remains illegal in Pakistan and has been criminalized under the national legislation as well as the provincial laws. Sections 371A and 371B of the Penal Code criminalize selling and buying of any person (irrespective of gender) for prostitution, respectively,⁸⁷ with offences punishable by imprisonment up to 25 years and a fine.⁸⁸ Furthermore, Section 366A of the Penal Code criminalizes the procurement of minor girls under the age of 18 for illicit intercourse, punishable with imprisonment up to 10 years and a fine,⁸⁹ while Section 366B establishes the offence of importation of a girl under 21 years from a foreign country for illicit intercourse, punishable with imprisonment up to 10 years and a fine.⁹⁰ The courts apply Sections 366A, 366B, 371A and 371B depending on facts and circumstances of each case. Usually, in the case of girl victims, Sections 366A-366B are invoked.⁹¹ The provisions mentioned above are discriminatory, as there is no similar provision for boys, leaving them without any protection against being procured for exploitation in prostitution.

Notwithstanding, offences involving boy victims could fall under Section 377A, which criminalizes child sexual abuse. According to that section, “Whoever employs, uses, forces, persuades, induces, entices, or coerces any person to engage in, or assist any other person to engage in fondling, stroking, caressing, exhibitionism, voyeurism or any obscene or sexually explicit conduct, or simulation of such conduct either independently or in conjunction with other acts, with or without consent where age of a person is less than eighteen years, is said to commit the offence of sexual abuse.”⁹² The offence is punishable with

imprisonment between 14-20 years and a fine of at least 1 million rupees (approx. US\$5,700 as of January 2022).⁹³

Additionally, acts relating to prostitution could be penalised under the Prevention of Trafficking in Persons Act 2018 under the scope of the offence of ‘trafficking’.⁹⁴ Section 3 of this Act criminalizes trafficking in persons for, among other purposes, commercial sex. This section provides enhanced punishment if the victims are children. Accordingly, an offender is liable to be punished with imprisonment ranging between 2-10 years or a fine up to 1 million rupees (approx. US\$5,700 as of January 2022) or both.⁹⁵ The use of ‘or’ is a serious gap in the law as this gives the courts discretion to dispose of offenders with a fine, which could theoretically operate in the favour of wealthy and powerful offenders.

At the provincial level, there are some laws that address the exploitation of children in prostitution. For instance, Section 40 of the Punjab Destitute and Neglected Children’s Act, 2004, criminalizes exposing children to the risk of prostitution and other immoral conditions.⁹⁶ The Punjab Suppression of Prostitution Ordinance, 1961, prohibits prostitution, and contains specific offences relating to the exploitation of children in prostitution.⁹⁷ However, these provisions are gendered and protect only girls.

ONLINE CHILD SEXUAL EXPLOITATION AND ABUSE

The number of Internet users in Pakistan was already increasing at a rapid pace when the world was hit by the Covid 19 pandemic in 2020, drastically altering all our lives, including children. Technological devices and virtual teaching replaced classroom teaching and increased

86 Government of Pakistan. (1973). *The Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan*, Article 37-g.

87 Government of Pakistan. (1860). *Pakistan Penal Code (Act No. XLV of 1860)*, Sections 371A and 371B.

88 *Ibid.* Sections 371A and 371B.

89 *Ibid.* Section 366A.

90 *Ibid.* Section 366B.

91 PAHCHAAN. (2021). Personal Communication.

92 Government of Pakistan. (1860). *Pakistan Penal Code (Act No. XLV of 1860)*, Section 377A.

93 *Ibid.*, Section 377B as amended by the *Criminal Law (Amendment) Act 2018*.

94 Government of Pakistan. (2018). *Prevention of Trafficking in Persons Act, 2018*, Section 3(1).

95 *Ibid.*, Section 3(2).

96 Government of Punjab. (2004). *Punjab Destitute and Neglected Children Act (Act XVIII of 2004)*, Section 40.

97 Government of Punjab. (1961). *Punjab Suppression of Prostitution Ordinance, 1961 (W.P. Ordinance II Of 1961)*, Sections 7-10.

numbers of children began learning online.⁹⁸ However, the increasing online presence of children also resulted in greater risk of exposure to the dark side of the Internet. Globally, a spike in reporting of cases relating to online child sexual exploitation and abuse (OCSEA) during the pandemic was observed.⁹⁹ The ‘Cruel Numbers 2020’ report in Pakistan revealed that 89 cases of child sexual abuse material (CSAM) were reported in 2020,¹⁰⁰ 66 of which (74%) involved boy victims.¹⁰¹ Even before the pandemic, it was established that online exploitation occurs in, and is enabled by, the cultural context and social structures of the offline world.¹⁰²

In Pakistan, OCSEA-related offences are mainly addressed under the Penal Code and the Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act. Section 292B of the Penal Code defines CSAM as “any photograph, film, video, picture or representation, portrait or computer generated image or picture, whether made or produced by electronic, mechanical or other means, of obscene or sexually explicit conduct, where – (a) the production of such visual depiction involves the use of a minor boy or girl engaging in obscene or sexually explicit conduct; (b) such visual depiction is a digital image, computer image, or computer generated image that is, or is indistinguishable from, that of a minor engaging in obscene or sexually explicit conduct; or (c) such visual depiction has been created, adapted, or modified to appear that an identifiable minor is engaging in obscene or sexually explicit conduct [...]”.¹⁰³ Additionally, also the Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act contains a specific provision, Section 22, covering CSAM. It defines CSAM as “material in an information system, that visually depicts – (a) a minor engaged in sexually explicit conduct; (b) a person appearing to be a minor engaged in sexually explicit conduct; or (c) realistic images representing a minor engaged in sexually explicit conduct; or (d) discloses the identity of the minor[...]” Here, “minor”

means persons below the age of 18 years.¹⁰⁴ Both definitions comprehensively define CSAM, largely in line with the OPSC, and cover digitally generated CSAM and images depicting persons as minors engaged in sexually explicit conduct. However, both the definitions explicitly cover only visual material. Moreover, the definitions do not cover materials depicting sexual parts of a child primarily for sexual purposes.

The national legislation also criminalizes certain acts associated with CSAM. Section 292B (1) of the Penal Code criminalizes the production of CSAM, while Section 292B (2) criminalizes the preparation, possession, or distribution of CSAM stored on a “computer disk or any other modern gadget.”¹⁰⁵ This essentially criminalizes the use of Internet and communication technologies for committing CSAM-related acts. These acts are punishable with imprisonment between 14-20 years or with a fine of not less than 1 million rupees (approx. US\$5,700 as of January 2022) or both.¹⁰⁶ Additionally, the Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act, 2016, which criminalizes production, distribution, and transmission of CSAM through an “information system.” This also criminalizes procurement of CSAM, either for oneself or for another person. Furthermore, this section penalises the mere possession of CSAM, without any lawful justification.¹⁰⁷ These acts are punishable with imprisonment of up to 7 years, or fine up to 5 million rupees (approx. US\$28,330 as of January 2022) or both.¹⁰⁸

Viewing or accessing CSAM and knowingly attending pornographic performances involving children are not criminal conduct according to the Pakistani legislation. More importantly, there is no legal provision that exempts a child from any criminal liability for sharing CSAM, especially when compelled to do so in an abusive situation. Consequently, children could be prevented and/or discouraged from reporting due to fear of prosecution. Offenders could also theoretically

98 Claudia Cappa et al. (2020). [Sexual Exploitation of Boys in Times of Crisis: What can we learn from existing research, and what is still unknown?](#)

99 ECPAT International. (2020). [Summary Paper: Online Child Sexual Exploitation](#).

100 Sahil. (2020). [Cruel Numbers 2020 Report](#), 9.

101 *Ibid.*, 10.

102 UNICEF South Asia. (2016). [Victims Are Not Virtual: Situation assessment of online child sexual exploitation in South Asia](#).

103 Government of Pakistan. (1860). [Pakistan Penal Code \(Act No. XLV of 1860\)](#), Section 292B.

104 Government of Pakistan. (2016). [Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act, 2016](#), Section 2(1)(xxiv).

105 Government of Pakistan. (1860). [Pakistan Penal Code \(Act No. XLV of 1860\)](#), Section 292B.

106 Government of Pakistan. (1860). [Pakistan Penal Code \(Act No. XLV of 1860\)](#), Section 292C as amended by the [Criminal Law \(Amendment\) Act 2018](#).

107 Government of Pakistan. (2016). [Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act, 2016](#), Section 22(1).

108 *Ibid.* Section 22(2).

take advantage of this loophole to blackmail children and exploit them for their own benefit.¹⁰⁹

Our understanding of online forms of child sexual exploitation has developed rapidly in the last two decades, alongside the growth of social media apps and platforms. In the early 2000's, OCSEA was mostly observed in relation to production, possession and distribution of CSAM online. More recently, OCSEA has evolved to include a variety of offences such as live streaming of child sexual abuse, online grooming of children for sexual purposes, sexual extortion¹¹⁰ and coercion among others.¹¹¹ The rapid advancement in information and communication technologies has also provided offenders with more avenues and sophisticated means to identify, target, groom - and to abuse and exploit children.

Pakistan fails to adequately address these OCSEA offences under its legislation. The national legislation indeed does not criminalize the live streaming of child sexual abuse online, and does not explicitly criminalize online sexual extortion and online grooming. Nevertheless, these offences could fall under some of the existing legal provisions. The Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act criminalizes certain acts committed against the modesty of a person, including minors, using an information system.¹¹² This provision could be used to criminalize the offenders for offences such as online sexual extortion. This offence, if committed against a minor is punishable with imprisonment up to 7 years and a fine up to 5 million rupees (approx. US\$28,330 as of January 2022),¹¹³ with repeated offences against minors resulting

in potential imprisonment for 10 years and a fine.¹¹⁴ Furthermore, Section 292A of the Penal Code criminalizes the seduction of children through any means to involve them in any sexual activity or expose them to obscene and sexually explicit material. Although it does not specifically address online grooming, it could be used to cover such cases in absence of an explicit and specific provision. This section also criminalizes attempts, potentially addressing cases where such seduction does not result in an actual act. The offence is punishable with imprisonment of 1-7 years or fine between 100,000-500,000 rupees (approx. US\$566 to US\$2,833 as of January 2022) or both.¹¹⁵ [Although the above-mentioned sections could be invoked to penalise offenders for OCSEA offences, during our research we didn't come across any case law which supports this assertion].

In terms of data retention and preservation laws, the Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act, 2016, provides for the retention of data by service providers under Section 32.¹¹⁶ The term "services provider"¹¹⁷ should in theory cover Internet service providers, mobile phone companies, social media companies, cloud storage companies, and the wider technology industry. However, these provisions do not apply exclusively to OCSEA offences, but all offences covered by this Act. Additionally, Pakistani legislation does not impose any obligation on Internet service providers to control, block and remove CSAM, and report behaviour harmful to children, to the relevant authorities.¹¹⁸ In fact, the Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act exempts them from any liability arising out of any content hosted by them.¹¹⁹

109 UNICEF South Asia. (2016). *Victims are not virtual- Situation assessment of online child sexual exploitation in South Asia*, 85.

110 Sexual extortion, also called "sextortion", is the blackmailing of a person with the help of self-generated images of that person to extort sexual favours, money, or other benefits from her/him under the threat of sharing the material beyond the consent of the depicted person (e.g., posting images on social media). (*Terminology Guidelines*, 52)

111 ECPAT International. (2020). *Summary paper: Online Child Sexual Exploitation*. 2.

112 Government of Pakistan. (2016). *Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act, 2016*, Section 21.

113 *Ibid.*, Section 21(2).

114 *Ibid.*, Section 21(2).

115 Government of Pakistan. (1860). *Pakistan Penal Code (Act No. XLV of 1860)*, Section 292A.

116 Government of Pakistan. (2016). *Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act, 2016*, Section 32.

117 Section 2(1)(xxviii) of the Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act defines the term "service providers" to include persons who "(a) acts as a service provider in relation to sending, receiving, storing processing or distribution of any electronic communication or the provision of other services in relation to electronic communication through an information system; (b) owns, possesses, operates, manages or controls a public switched network or provides telecommunication services or (c) processes or stores data on behalf of such electronic communication service or users of such service."

118 ECPAT International. (2020). *Summary paper: Online Child Sexual Exploitation*. 17.

119 Article 38, "Limitation of liability of service providers" of the Prevention of Electronic Offences Act sets the conditions that exempt ISPs from liability. "(1) No service provider shall be subject to any civil or criminal liability, unless it is established that the service provider had specific actual knowledge and wellful intent to proactively and positively participate, and not merely through omission or failure to act, and thereby facilitated, aided or abetted the use by any person of any information system, service, application, online platform or telecommunication system maintained, controlled or managed by the service provider in connection with a contravention of this Act or rules made there under or any other law for the time being in force."

Consequently, there are no self-regulatory duties on the Internet service providers regarding OCSEA offences. The Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act does, however, allow child victims and their parents/guardians to apply to the Pakistan Telecommunication Authority for the removal or destruction of CSAM-related information.¹²⁰ The Federal Investigation Authority regularly monitors and directs Internet service providers to follow the instructions and guidance provided by the Pakistan Telecommunication Authority for blocking sites etc.¹²¹

The Federal Investigation Agency of Pakistan has established the National Response Centre for Cyber Crimes, a specialised cyber division, with technical expertise and tools to conduct investigations of online crimes. The National Response Centre for Cyber Crimes can deploy its capacities in investigations of crimes against children, but it is reportedly limited in both jurisdiction and funding.^{122,123} Local practitioners report how law enforcement authorities lack the capacity to handle OCSEA crimes, and that they are not adequately trained, do not understand the nuances of such crimes and hence, are reluctant to register them.¹²⁴

SALE AND TRAFFICKING OF CHILDREN FOR SEXUAL PURPOSES

Whilst statistics detailing the prevalence of human trafficking in Pakistan exist, much of the research has not been disaggregated by age, gender, or purpose of exploitation. In 2016, the UN CRC Committee expressed serious concern regarding Pakistan being a significant source,

transit country and destination for children trafficked for sexual exploitation and forced bonded labor.¹²⁵ As previously noted - women, girls, and boys are particularly vulnerable to trafficking for sexual exploitation,¹²⁶ with trafficking for sexual exploitation and bonded labor the most common forms of trafficking in the country, while boys who have run away from home are noted as particularly vulnerable.¹²⁷ According to the 2021 US Department of State's Trafficking in Persons Report for Pakistan, many Pakistani boys were sold to Afghan security forces for *bacha bazi*,¹²⁸ and Pakistani boys are also vulnerable to sex traffickers in Greece.¹²⁹

Offences relating to trafficking are mainly criminalized under the Penal Code and Prevention of Trafficking in Persons Act, 2018. Section 3(1) of the Act criminalized recruiting, harbouring, transporting, providing, or obtaining another person for compelled labor or commercial sex acts using force, fraud, or coercion.¹³⁰ The offence is punishable with imprisonment between 2-10 years, or a fine of up to one million rupees (US\$5,700 as of January 2022) or both, in cases where it involves a child victim,¹³¹ with this section also criminalizing attempts to commit an offence.¹³² The Act covers both domestic, as well as international trafficking, with Section 8(2) which mandates the Federal Investigation Agency with investigatory powers over trafficking cases which involve "transportation of victims into or out of Pakistan."¹³³

The Prevention of Trafficking in Persons Act explicitly states that the means of trafficking (force, coercion, fraud) are not required to constitute the crime in the case of child victims.¹³⁴ This is in line with the UN Trafficking Protocol which removes the need of means to constitute

120 Government of Pakistan. (2016). [Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act, 2016](#), Sections 21(3) and 22(2).

121 PAHCHAAN, Pakistan. (2021). Personal Communication.

122 UNICEF South Asia. (2016). [Victims are not virtual- Situation assessment of online child sexual exploitation in South Asia](#). 82.

123 PAHCHAAN. (2021). Personal Communication.

124 *Ibid.*

125 Committee on the Rights of the Child. (2016). [Concluding observations on the fifth periodic report of Pakistan](#), para 75.

126 National Initiative Against Organised Crime, Pakistan. (2020). [Policy Brief: Human smuggling and trafficking in Pakistan](#). 7.

127 *Ibid.*, 8.

128 US Department of State. (2021). [Trafficking in Persons Report: Pakistan](#).

129 *Ibid.*

130 Government of Pakistan. (2018). [Prevention of Trafficking in Persons Act, 2018](#), Section 3(1).

131 *Ibid.*, Section 3(2).

132 *Ibid.*, Section 3(1).

133 *Ibid.*, Section 8(2).

134 *Ibid.*, Section 7.

the offence of child trafficking,¹³⁵ implying that the means are irrelevant when the trafficking involves a child.¹³⁶ However, Pakistan is yet to sign or ratify this Protocol. Also noteworthy is that the Prevention of Trafficking in Persons Act exempts victims from being criminalized under any offence covered by the Act.¹³⁷

The national legislation does not establish a separate offence related to the sale of children. Despite this, acts relating to the sale of children could theoretically be addressed under Sections 371A and 371B of the Penal Code which, as previously indicated in the section on exploitation in prostitution, criminalize selling/buying, letting, hiring or disposing of persons for prostitution, illicit intercourse, or any other unlawful or immoral purpose.¹³⁸ As these sections are generic and do not specifically address children, they do not adequately criminalize the 'sale of children' in line with the OPSC. It must be noted that although the 'sale of children' always involves some form of commercial transaction, it does not require the purpose of exploiting a child (e.g., sale of children for illegal adoption). Therefore, 'sale of children' is not necessarily related to sexual abuse and sexual or other forms of exploitation.¹³⁹ However, under Sections 371A and 371B of the Penal Code, selling and buying of persons must be for sexual, immoral, or unlawful purposes. The Penal Code does not define what constitutes an unlawful or immoral purpose, making it very difficult to establish the scope of these provisions.

Whilst the national legislation is largely consistent with international instruments, the enforcement of law appears to be weak. According to the US Department's 2021 Trafficking in Persons Report for Pakistan, police did not register cases of child trafficking for sexual purposes, unless victims paid a bribe.¹⁴⁰ Local practitioners report how the law enforcement authorities lack the capacity to handle crimes relating to trafficking, and that they are not adequately trained and do not understand

the nuances of such crimes and hence, are reluctant to register them.¹⁴¹

SEXUAL EXPLOITATION OF CHILDREN IN TRAVEL AND TOURISM

Over the last decades globally, the travel and tourism industry has developed at a rapid pace. The growth of tourism also means that child sex offenders can use the infrastructure of the travel and tourism industry, to identify and target children to commit their crimes.¹⁴²

Pakistan lacks specific legislation on SECTT that ensures the liability of the private travel and tourism sector for offences of sexual exploitation of children. Notwithstanding, Section 11 of the Penal Code makes it clear that the term "person" includes a company or association, or body of persons, whether incorporated or not.¹⁴³ Therefore, for SEC offences under the Penal Code, private travel and tourism companies may in theory be held liable, and could also be held liable for CSAM-related offences under the Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act.¹⁴⁴ Currently, travel and tourism industry companies are not obligated by law to adhere to specific national codes for child protection, or to include a warning against the illegality of SECTT-related conduct in their information, marketing and promotional material.

Furthermore, Pakistani legislation does not regulate travellers access to children. For example, the use of international volunteers in childcare centres and in activities involving direct contact with children, is currently not regulated. Further, legislation does not mandate the requirement of conducting criminal background checks of individuals applying for work with or for children. Notwithstanding, convicted offenders

135 UN General Assembly. (2000, November 15). [Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons Especially Women and Children supplementing the UN Convention against Transnational Organized Crime](#). Article 3 (c).

136 Interagency Working Group on Sexual Exploitation of Children. (2016). [Terminology Guidelines for the Protection of Children from Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse](#). 60.

137 Government of Pakistan. (2018). [Prevention of Trafficking in Persons Act, 2018](#), Section 6.

138 Government of Pakistan. (1860). [Pakistan Penal Code \(Act No. XLV of 1860\)](#), Sections 371A and 371B.

139 ECPAT International. (2020). [Summary Paper: Sale and Trafficking of Children for Sexual Purposes](#). 2.

140 US Department of State. (2021). [Trafficking in Persons Report: Pakistan](#).

141 PAHCHAAN. (2021). Personal Communication.

142 ECPAT International. (2020). [Summary Paper: Sexual Exploitation of Children in Travel and Tourism](#). 1.

143 Government of Pakistan. (1860). [Pakistan Penal Code \(Act No. XLV of 1860\)](#), Section 11.

144 PAHCHAAN. (2021). Personal Communication.

cannot hold any public office,¹⁴⁵ however in the private sector there is no provision that prohibits them from holding positions involving work with or for children.¹⁴⁶ The Anti-Rape (Investigation and Trial) Act, 2021 adopted in December 2021 sets forth an obligation for the National Data-Base and Registration Authority to set up a national sex offender registry.¹⁴⁷ As of January 2022, there have been no updates on the registry. In addition, the Police Rule legislation requires a register to be maintained with the details of the sex offenders.¹⁴⁸

Although explicit provisions that deny entry or leave to foreigners convicted of offences of sexual exploitation of children do not exist, the provisions of the Foreigners Act, 1946, may apply. According to Section 3(1) of the Act, “the Federal Government may by orders, make provision either generally or with respect to all foreigners, or with respect to any particular foreigner, or any prescribed class or description of foreigner, for prohibiting, regulating or restricting the entry of foreigners into Pakistan, or their departure therefrom, or their presence or continued stay therein.”¹⁴⁹ According to Section 3(2), such orders may provide, *inter alia*, for restrictions on entry, exit, movement in Pakistan, etc.¹⁵⁰

CHILD, EARLY, AND FORCED MARRIAGE

Child, early and forced marriage (CEFM) is an issue that affects girls and boys, and it is estimated that globally, in 2019, 115 million boys and men were married before the age of 18, out of whom 23 million were married before they turned 15 years of age.¹⁵¹ Although boys may not

face risks of sexual violence in the way that girls do, those who marry early face increased social pressure to play the role of the ‘breadwinner’ and take up responsibilities of the household, bringing their childhood to an early end.¹⁵² The practice of child marriage remains widespread in Pakistan and also affects boys. According to the Cruel Numbers report, 119 child marriages were reported in newspapers in 2020.¹⁵³ The Pakistan Demographic and Health Survey for 2017-2018, identified that three percent of boys aged 15-19 were married during the survey period.¹⁵⁴ In 2016, the UN CRC Committee expressed concern about the persistent practice of child marriage in the country, and inconsistencies in domestic legislation. It recommended the State to enforce legislation to prohibit child marriage throughout the country and to investigate and prosecute persons, including members of the local councils, who endorse such harmful practices.¹⁵⁵

In Pakistan, the main law relating to child marriage is the Child Marriages Restraint Act, 1929, which sets the minimum age of marriage for boys and girls, at 18 and 16 respectively.¹⁵⁶ However, this age is not uniform throughout the country,¹⁵⁷ for instance, in the Sindh province, the Sindh Child Marriage Restraint Act, 2013, sets the minimum age of marriage for both girls and boys at 18.¹⁵⁸ Apart from the inconsistencies at the national and provincial levels, Sharia law allows girls who have reached the age of puberty to marry.¹⁵⁹ This implies that girls as young as 10 can marry provided they have attained puberty.

The Child Marriage Restraint Act, 1929, criminalizes certain acts associated with child marriages, and adult men who marry a child are liable to be punished under the Act.¹⁶⁰ Similarly,

145 Government of Pakistan. [The Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan](#), Article 63.

146 *Ibid.*

147 Government of Pakistan. (2021). [Anti-Rape \(Investigation and Trial\) Act, 2021](#), Section 24.

148 Government of Pakistan. (1934). [Police Rules, 1934](#), Rule 27.29.

149 Government of Pakistan. (1946). [Foreigners Act, 1946](#), Section 3(1).

150 *Ibid.*, Section 3(2).

151 UN News. (2019). [Around 23 million boys have married before reaching 15; ‘we can end this violation’ says UNICEF chief.](#)

152 ECPAT International. (2020). [Summary Paper: Child, Early and Forced Marriages as a Form of, or Pathway to Sexual Exploitation of Children.](#)

153 Sahil. (2020). [Cruel Numbers Report 2020](#), 1.

154 [National Institute of Population Studies, Islamabad. \(2019\). Pakistan Demographic and Health Survey for 2017-2018.](#) 68.

155 Committee on the Rights of the Child. (2016). [Concluding observations on the fifth periodic report of Pakistan](#), para 38.

156 Government of Pakistan. (1929). [The Child Marriage Restraint Act](#), Section 2(a).

157 Pursuant to the 18th Amendment to the Constitution of 2010, ‘marriage’ comes with the jurisdiction the provinces and therefore, they are authorised to pass their own versions of the Child Marriage Restraint Act. However, only Sindh province has passed its own such legislation, while another province—Punjab—has passed a few amendments to the CMRA.

158 Government of Sindh. (2014). [The Sindh Child Marriages Restraint Act \(No. XV of 2013\)](#), Section 2(a).

159 See e.g. Ibrahim I., Hussain, F. and Abdul Aziz, N. (2010). [The Child Bride: Rights under the Civil and Sharia Law.](#)

160 Government of Pakistan. (1929). [The Child Marriage Restraint Act](#), Section 4.

a person who performs a child marriage¹⁶¹ and -only- male parents who permit their children (irrespective of gender) to be married are also liable to be punished under the Act.¹⁶² Although not explicitly provided by law, in practice, the defence of the ignorance of the age of the victim, cannot be used by the offender as an excuse for his conduct and verification of age of the parties is a prerequisite for the solemnisation of all marriages.¹⁶³ However, the penalties provided under the Act are not sufficiently stringent to deter people from committing offences. The maximum punishment stipulated is one month's imprisonment or a fine of 1,000 rupees (US\$6 as of January 2022) or both, except in Punjab, where the punishment has increased to six months imprisonment with a fine of 50,000 rupees (US\$283 as of January 2022).¹⁶⁴ The Act is silent regarding the validity of child marriages solemnised in violation of these provisions, and the Act has no provisions for the rehabilitation and reintegration of victims. The Penal Code also criminalizes forced marriages however, only protecting girls.¹⁶⁵ At the provincial level, the Sindh Child Marriage Restraint Act 2013 also makes child marriage a punishable offence in the Sindh province.¹⁶⁶

Another CEFM-related issue of importance in Pakistan is the practice of dowry. Despite being regulated by the Dowry and Bridal Gifts (Restriction Act 1976), dowry is a commonly accepted practice in Pakistan.¹⁶⁷ However, this issue mostly affects girls, who are considered as financial burdens by their families. The younger the brides, the less the dowry.¹⁶⁸ This is one of the justifications given for child marriages and hence, affects both boys and girls. The Dowry and Bridal Gifts (Restriction) Act 1976 restricts the dowry amount to 5,000 rupees (approx. US\$28 as of January 2022).¹⁶⁹ However, weak enforcement of

this law is a challenge, and consequently, dowry is quite common, especially in rural areas of Pakistan.¹⁷⁰

EXTRATERRITORIALITY AND EXTRADITION

With the growth in the travel and tourism industry, it has become easier for individuals to travel abroad and commit crimes against children.¹⁷¹ Therefore, in the context of SEC offences, extraterritorial jurisdiction becomes vitally important, as it gives the States power to have jurisdiction on crimes committed by their citizens, or on their citizens outside their territory, in accordance with Article 4 of the OPSC. Similarly, extradition is essential, so that the state can return offenders to the country where the crime was committed, or their home country.¹⁷²

For SEC offences under the Penal Code, Sections 3 and 4, relating to extraterritorial jurisdiction apply. According to these sections, every citizen of Pakistan and every person in the service of the State, regardless of citizenship, is liable to be tried in Pakistan, for any offence committed beyond the territory of Pakistan.¹⁷³ Moreover, as Section 4 establishes, the law extends to 'any person on any ship or aircraft registered in Pakistan wherever it may be'.¹⁷⁴ Similarly, for CSAM-related offences, under the Prevention of Electronic Offences Act, Section 1(4) extends the application of the Act to offences committed outside Pakistan by any person.¹⁷⁵ However, this is subject to the act constituting the offence being an offence under this Act, and affecting a person, property, information system or data, located in Pakistan.¹⁷⁶ It appears that the regime of extraterritorial jurisdiction provided by the Act is applicable to

161 *Ibid.*, Section 5.

162 *Ibid.*, Section 6.

163 PAHCHAAN. (2021). Personal Communication.

164 Government of Pakistan. (1929). [The Child Marriage Restraint Act](#), Section 4-6.

165 Government of Pakistan. (1860). [Pakistan Penal Code \(Act No. XLV of 1860\)](#), Section 498-B.

166 Government of Sindh. (2014). [The Sindh Child Marriages Restraint Act \(No. XV of 2013\)](#), Sections 3-5.

167 UNICEF; UNFPA. (2019). [Child Marriage in South Asia: An evidence reviews](#). 21.

168 ECPAT International. (2020). [Summary Paper: Child, Early and Forced Marriages as a Form of, or Pathway to Sexual Exploitation of Children](#).

169 Government of Pakistan. (1976). [Dowry and Bridal Gifts \(Restriction\) Act 1976](#), Section 3.

170 PAHCHAAN. (2021). Personal Communication.

171 ECPAT International. (2020). [Summary Paper: Sexual Exploitation of Children in Travel and Tourism](#). 1.

172 ECPAT International. (2018). [Assessment of legal frameworks that address sexual exploitation of children in travel and tourism \(SECTT\)](#). 17.

173 Government of Pakistan. (1860). [Pakistan Penal Code \(Act No. XLV of 1860\)](#), Sections 3 and 4.

174 *Ibid.*, Section 4.

175 Government of Pakistan. (2016). [Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act, 2016](#), Section 1(4).

176 *Ibid.*

any person, provided that a link to Pakistan exists. The Prevention of Trafficking in Persons Act, 2018, does not explicitly provide for extraterritorial jurisdiction.

It is unclear whether the principle of double criminality, which requires an act to be an offence in both Pakistan and the country where it happened for the offender to be prosecuted, applies to extraterritorial jurisdiction in Pakistan or not. A bare reading of the sections relating to extraterritoriality, appear to suggest that the principle does not apply.

General provisions on extraterritoriality are also included in Section 179 of the Code of Criminal Procedure, which extends the jurisdiction of the courts in Pakistan to places outside their local jurisdiction where persons, properties, etc., affected by an offence are situated.¹⁷⁷ Section 188 focuses on liability for offences committed outside Pakistan.¹⁷⁸ Further, Section 186 of the Code of Criminal Procedure, authorises a magistrate to issue a summons or warrant for offences committed beyond local jurisdiction.¹⁷⁹

The Extradition Act, 1972, allows for extradition to both treaty states (states with which Pakistan has an extradition treaty) and non-treaty (states with which Pakistan does not have an extradition treaty), if the government considers it expedient.¹⁸⁰ Pursuant to Section 2(1)(a) of this Act, for an offence to be extraditable, it should fall within one of the descriptions set out in the Schedule of the Act.¹⁸¹ As per the Schedule, the “procuring or trafficking in women or young persons for immoral purposes” is an extradition offence.¹⁸² Further, “stealing, abandoning, exposing or unlawfully detaining a child” and “rape” are also extraditable.¹⁸³ Apart from these, other SEC offences are not covered. In addition, the Act does not mention that in the absence of any extradition treaty, a convention (OPSC in the context of SEC offences) could be used as the

legal basis for extradition. This is inconsistent with Article 5 of the OPSC.¹⁸⁴ Hence, extradition has not been fully established over SEC offences in Pakistan.

ACCESS TO JUSTICE AND REMEDIES

National complaint mechanisms and reporting

For early detection of and timely response to SEC offences, proper monitoring and reporting mechanisms need to be in place. Therefore, professionals who work with children and institutions that, due to the nature of their activities, may come across suspected cases of SEC, must be duty bound to report such cases to the relevant authorities. These professionals and institutions would include healthcare professionals, social service professionals, teachers, law enforcement officers, ISPs, credit card companies, and banks.

However, in Pakistan, there are no mandatory reporting duties regarding SEC related crimes. This is a significant gap in the legislation that is likely to inhibit the government’s efforts to prevent and combat SEC. Moreover, national legislation does not establish a system for receiving and addressing reports relating to SEC. Further, no referral mechanism has been established by the legislation. Notwithstanding, the Anti-Rape (Investigation and Trial) Act, 2021, provides for the establishment of a reporting mechanism to receive information from the public.¹⁸⁵ As of January 2022, no further steps had been taken in this direction.

Pakistan does have a helpline, the Madadgaar National Helpline 1098, for women and children suffering from violence and abuse.¹⁸⁶ In addition, the Zainab Alert, Response and Recovery Act, 2020 provides for the establishment of a national

177 Government of Pakistan. (1898). *Code of Criminal Procedure (Act V of 1898)*, Section 179.

178 *Ibid.*, Section 188.

179 *Ibid.*, Section 186.

180 Government of Pakistan. (1972). *The Extradition Act, 1972*, Sections 1 and 4.

181 *Ibid.*, Section 2(1)(a).

182 *Ibid.*, Schedule.

183 Government of Pakistan. (1972). *The Extradition Act, 1972*, Schedule.

184 According to Article 5 of the OPSC, State Parties must ensure the extraditable character of these offences in extradition treaties and, in the absence of a treaty, based on the OPSC.

185 Government of Pakistan. (2021). *Anti-Rape (Investigation and Trial) Act, 2021* Section 25.

186 See: [Madadgar National Helpline 1098](#).

hotline number - 1099- to report missing or abducted children.¹⁸⁷ It is noted that this Act was passed in 2020, just before the COVID-19 pandemic, which resulted in a delay in the establishment of this complaints mechanism.¹⁸⁸ Notwithstanding, the Government has launched the Zainab Alert App, linked to the Pakistan Citizen Portal (Prime Minister Portal) to report missing children.¹⁸⁹

Ex-officio investigations (also called own initiative investigations) carried out by the public prosecutors could prove to be important in gathering evidence in suspected cases of SEC. In these cases, the prosecution would not have to depend on the child victim's complaint and can proceed, even in its absence.¹⁹⁰ However, in Pakistan, no such duty lies with the public prosecutors. It is usually the duty of the law enforcement agency to initiate investigation, and public prosecutors are only permitted to assist the police on legal points and impart legal guidance to the investigating officer during investigation. The main role of the Public Prosecutor - before the submission of a police report in the court and during the trial on behalf of the State - is to present the prosecution case and contest the claims of the defence.¹⁹¹ The Anti-Rape (Investigation and Trial) Act 2021 permits preventive action by the police, in respect of offences contained in the schedule¹⁹² such as rape, CSAM-related offences, etc.¹⁹³ Accordingly, if a police officer receives information regarding the commission of a scheduled offence, they are required by law to immediately take action to prevent the commission of such an offence, even if the reported offence has occurred in an area not under their jurisdiction.¹⁹⁴ This is an important

provision that could help the police in timely detection and prevention of SEC offences, and in the rescue of child victims.

In Pakistan, the investigation and prosecution of SEC offences do not depend on a report or accusation by the victim. Under Section 190 of the Code of Criminal Procedure, the court "may take cognizance of any offence (a) upon receiving a complaint of facts which constitute such offence; (b) upon a report in writing of such facts made by any police-officer; or (c) upon information received from any person other than a police-officer, or upon his own knowledge or suspicion that such offence has been committed."¹⁹⁵ In addition, Sections 154 and 155 of the Code of Criminal Procedure require police to record and act upon "every" piece of information they receive that relates to the commission of an offence.¹⁹⁶ In a case of a cognisable offence (one in which the police can arrest the accused without a warrant), the police must immediately launch an investigation¹⁹⁷ and seek the arrest of the offender.¹⁹⁸ If the offence is non-cognisable, the police must refer the informant to the magistrate court and await a court order to proceed.¹⁹⁹ Most SEC offences are cognisable and therefore may be investigated and prosecuted without a court order.²⁰⁰ Generally, anonymous complaints are not considered sufficient to open an investigation in criminal cases in Pakistan, but an inquiry can be initiated by the Police or Federal Investigation Agency, even on anonymous information related to any crime.²⁰¹ Encouragingly there are no statute of limitations for offences of sexual exploitation of children in Pakistan.

187 Government of Pakistan. (2020). *Zainab Alert, Response and Recovery Act (No. XV of 2020)*, Section 5(d).

188 PAHCHAAN. (2021). Personal Communication.

189 Dawn. (2020). *Zainab Alert application launched*.

190 ECPAT International. (2017). *Submission for the Universal Periodic Review of the human rights situation in Serbia to the Human Rights Council 29th Session (January 2018) UPR third cycle 2017 – 2021*. 4.

191 PAHCHAAN. (2021). Personal Communication.

192 Schedule to Anti-Rape (Investigation and Trial) Act 2021 contains offences covered under the Pakistan Penal Code: Section 292-A: Exposure to Seduction; Section 292-B: Child Pornography; Section 292-C: Punishment for Child Pornography; Section 369-A: Trafficking of Human Beings (repealed); and Sections 21 and 22 of the Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act, 2016.

193 Government of Pakistan. (2021). *Anti-Rape (Investigation and Trial) Act, 2021. Section 21*.

194 *Ibid.*

195 Government of Pakistan. (1898). *Code of Criminal Procedure (Act V of 1898)*, Section 190.

196 *Ibid.* Sections 154-155.

197 *Ibid.* Section 4(f).

198 *Ibid.* Section 4(n) read with 155(2).

199 *Ibid.* Section 155.

200 These include CSAM-related offences, exposure of a child to seduction, cruelty to a child, assault of a women with intent to outrage her modesty, procurement, or importation of minor girl for forced sex, human trafficking, rape, "unnatural" carnal intercourse, and sexual abuse.

201 PAHCHAAN. (2021). Personal Communication.

Child-sensitive justice

Lack of child-sensitive measures in place in justice delivery systems may amplify the trauma experienced by child victims of violence, exploitation or abuse.²⁰² To prevent child victims from secondary victimization and to ensure they are able to access justice, it is important for justice delivery systems to be child friendly, including having standards and procedures in place that create a justice system which fosters respect for and effective implementation of children's rights.²⁰³ According to the UN, rule of law efforts specifically in terms of justice for children must be strengthened through interventions to ensure full respect for children's rights. These include "promoting child-sensitive procedures and methods that ensure the child's full-fledged participation in judicial, administrative and community-based processes. This might require changes in law, legal practice (such as interview techniques), capacities and physical environment and, more generally, attitudes towards child participation."²⁰⁴

The Anti-Rape (Investigation and Trial) Act, 2021, provides for the establishment of special courts to deal with sex offences listed in the schedule to the Act.²⁰⁵ Under the Act, the term victim refer to women or children (both male and female) who have been subjected to any of the scheduled offences such as rape, and CSAM-related offences.²⁰⁶ Through a notification dated 7th May, 2021 the Ministry of Law and Justice, in consultation with the Chief Justice of Pakistan has designated all courts of session as special courts.²⁰⁷

Further, under the Anti-Rape (Investigation and Trial) Act 2021, victims are entitled to receive legal assistance,²⁰⁸ with Section 3(1)

of the Juvenile Justice System Act, 2018, also stipulating that every child victim is entitled to receive legal representation at the expense of the state.²⁰⁹ Section 6 of the Prevention of Trafficking in Persons Act, also provides for the provision of legal assistance to the victims under the Act.²¹⁰ Insofar as the protection of child victim and witnesses is concerned, Section 8 of the Anti-Rape (Investigation and Trial) Act 2021 authorises the Prime Minister to make rules establishing a victim and witness protection system.²¹¹ Likewise, Section 12 of the Prevention of Trafficking in Persons Act allows the courts to conduct in camera proceedings; seal or restrict access to court records of the proceedings; allow evidence of a victim or a witness behind a screen, or through a video link or the use of other information and communication technologies; etc., under circumstances contained in the rules made in this behalf.²¹² However, to date, no rules have been implemented in any jurisdiction of Pakistan.²¹³ Additionally, the Prevention of Trafficking in Persons Act, addresses the safety of victims and witnesses of any offence under the Act, thereby making it the duty of the government to take appropriate measures to provide adequate protection to victims or witnesses or other persons, if their safety is at risk.²¹⁴ The government may for example, relocate victims or witnesses and take measures to ensure confidentiality of their personal information.²¹⁵ It must be noted that the provisions under the Prevention of Trafficking in Persons Act are generic in nature, and do not specifically address child victims. Moreover, these only apply to trafficking offences under the Prevention of Trafficking in Persons Act.

Pursuant to Section 376A of the Penal Code, the disclosure of the identity of victim of rape, etc. is prohibited.²¹⁶

202 ECPAT International. (2017). *Through the Eyes of the Child: Barriers to Access to Justice and Remedies for Child Victims of Sexual Exploitation*, 72.

203 *Ibid.*, 29.

204 United Nations. (2008). *Guidance Note of The Secretary-General UN Approach to Justice for Children*, 5.

205 Government of Pakistan. (2021). *Anti-Rape (Investigation and Trial) Act, 2021*. Section 3.

206 *Ibid.*, Section 2(1)(k).

207 Dawn. (2021). *Sessions courts designated to handle rape cases*.

208 Government of Pakistan. (2021). *Anti-Rape (Investigation and Trial) Act, 2021*. Section 6.

209 Government of Pakistan. (2018). *Juvenile Justice System Act, 2018*, Section 3(1).

210 Government of Pakistan. (2018). *Prevention of Trafficking in Persons Act, 2018*, Section 6.

211 Government of Pakistan. (2021). *Anti-Rape (Investigation and Trial) Act, 2021*. Section 8.

212 Government of Pakistan. (2018). *Prevention of Trafficking in Persons Act, 2018*, Section 12.

213 PAHCHAAN. (2021). Personal Communication.

214 Government of Pakistan. (2018). *Prevention of Trafficking in Persons Act, 2018*, Section 11(1)

215 *Ibid.*, Section 11(2).

216 Government of Pakistan. (1860). *Pakistan Penal Code (Act No. XLV of 1860)*, Section 376A.

The provincial laws such as the Islamabad Capital Territory Child Protection Act, 2018; Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Child Protection and Welfare Act, 2010; and the Sindh Child Protection Authority Act, 2011 ensure the rights and welfare of the child victims to a certain extent. For instance, the Islamabad Capital Territory Child Protection Act provides for seeking the views of the child, where the child is of sufficient age and level of maturity.²¹⁷ It also ensures the right of privacy of the child victims by prohibiting the publication of personal information relating to them.²¹⁸ Likewise, the Sindh Child Protection Authority Act, 2011, provides that the Authority will ensure the rights of the children in need of special protection measures.²¹⁹ Furthermore, the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Child Protection and Welfare Act requires the courts to inform children at risk of the situation and obtain their views before making a decision relating to their custody and care.²²⁰

To conclude, national legislation does not adequately ensure a child victim of sexual exploitation access to child-sensitive justice. Legislation does not comprehensively provide for child-friendly interview methods, none of the laws mentioned above ensure the provision of psychological support to child victims, and there are no dedicated courts for child victims. In its 2016 concluding observations, the UN CRC Committee observed that “the best interests of the child are often disregarded in the justice system” in Pakistan.²²¹ The Committee recommended the government to take efforts to ensure that this principle is complied with in all its decisions, policies, schemes, and legislative, administrative, and judicial proceedings affecting children.²²²

Access to recovery and reintegration

In Pakistan, national legislation does not ensure the right of recovery and rehabilitation of child victims of sexual exploitation, and there are no programmes that specifically cater to the support needs of these children. Notwithstanding, the Government has established 13 Centres which support child victims of violence, including sexual exploitation. These centres provide non-formal education, psycho-social support, counselling, legal aid, and personal rehabilitation.²²³

The Islamabad Capital Territory Child Protection Act is an example of a specific law that exclusively caters to the recovery and rehabilitation needs of the child victims, providing for the preparation of individual child care plans for children in need of protection and care.²²⁴ Pursuant to Sections 5(1) and 2(1)(t) of the Act, children in need of protection and care, include children who have been subjected to sexual abuse and exploitation²²⁵ and hence, child victims of sexual exploitation would be included. The Act also incorporates the principle of the best interest of the child.²²⁶

However, in 2019 a UNICEF report noted the complete lack of integrated victim support services in Pakistan.²²⁷ According to the report, the government does not provide adequate victims’ services for mental or physical care, restitution, or legal aid, and although there are some child protection units in some provinces, they suffer from procedural irregularities.²²⁸ The report recommended that the government make efforts to provide child victims with access to mental services, with the 2021 US Department of State’s Trafficking in Persons Report also making

217 Government of Pakistan. (2018). *Islamabad Capital Territory Child Protection Act (No. XXI of 2018)*, Section 17.

218 *Ibid.*, Section 28.

219 Government of Sindh. (2010). *Sindh Child Protection Authority Act (No. XIV of 2011)*, Section 10(1)(b) and Section 10(1)(q).

220 Government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. (2010). *Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Child Protection and Welfare Act, 2010*, 16(2).

221 Committee on the Rights of the Child. (2016). *Concluding observations on the fifth periodic report of Pakistan*, para 20

222 *Ibid.*, para 21.

223 Committee on the Rights of the Child. (2020). *Pakistan’s Initial Report to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child on the implementation of the Optional Protocol on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography*, para 63.

224 Government of Pakistan. (2018). *Islamabad Capital Territory Child Protection Act (No. XXI of 2018)*, Section 14.

225 *Ibid.*, Section 5(1) and Section 2(1)(t).

226 Government of Pakistan. (2018). *Islamabad Capital Territory Child Protection Act (No. XXI of 2018)*, Section 3.

227 UNICEF South Asia. (2016). *Victims are not virtual- Situation assessment of online child sexual exploitation in South Asia*. 83; 85.

228 *Ibid.*, 83; 85.

similar observations. According to this report, not all trafficking victims are able to access victim services due to a lack of available shelter and services in many regions, and this is particularly true for male victims, with most provision focused on female victims. There are neither any special services for male victims nor they can access services through government-run shelters for women.²²⁹ The report also noted a general perception that male victims would not require the same support services as female victims.²³⁰

Access to compensation

Victims of SEC in Pakistan have access to compensation under the national legislation. However, available provisions are not specifically addressed to child victims. For trafficking-related offences, Section 13 of the Prevention of Trafficking in Persons Act provides for compensation stating that, “Where an offender is convicted of an offence under this Act, the Court may direct payment of compensation to the victim under Section 545 of the Code of Criminal Procedure.”²³¹ Section 45 of the Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act, 2016, authorises the courts to make an order for the payment of compensation to the victims of offences under the Act, in addition to other punishments.²³² For other SEC offences, generic provision relating to compensation under the Criminal Procedure Code may be considered. Section 545 of the Code authorises the criminal courts to pay compensation for expenses incurred in the prosecution; and in relation to losses, injuries, or mental anguish.²³³ Further, the Anti-Rape (Investigation and Trial) Act, 2021 provides for the payment of compensation to women and child victims of rape and other scheduled offences under the Act.²³⁴

Additionally, the Government of Pakistan has established the Human Rights Relief and Revolving Fund managed by the Ministry of Human Rights. The fund may be used to provide

the victims of human rights violations with access to emergency money to meet their medical expenses, and SEC offences are considered as human rights violations.²³⁵ The maximum amount that can be paid to the victims is 10,000 rupees (approx. US\$57 as of January 2022).²³⁶ In addition, the ICT Child Protection Act provides for the establishment of a ‘Child Care and Protection Fund’ for providing protection and care services to children.²³⁷ It is unclear whether non-national victims have access to these funds. At the time of writing, the fund had not been established in practice, and the rules regarding its establishment were being approved by the government.²³⁸

CONCLUSION

Overall, Pakistan has shown an evident commitment towards legislatively addressing the sexual exploitation of children. This is evident through its ratification of key international instruments and the adoption of stringent laws for combatting SEC crimes. However, the legal framework relating to SEC still requires strengthening to protect children, particularly boys, from sexual exploitation in all its forms.

National legislation does not adequately protect boys against SEC. Although the Criminal Laws (Amendment) Act, 2021, introduced a gender-neutral definition of rape, some offences continue to protect only girls. SEC offences such as the procurement for prostitution under the Penal Code exclusively protect girls, and for similar offences involving boy victims, there are no explicit provisions. Although these offences could be prosecuted under other legislation, the penalties provided under those provisions are less severe when compared to girl victims. Moreover, the criminalization of homosexuality further dilutes the protection afforded to boys in comparison to their female counterparts. This has the potential to hinder prosecution efforts, revictimize the child and cause avoidable stress in the reporting

229 PAHCHAAN, Pakistan. (2021). Personal Communication.

230 US Department of State. (2021). [Trafficking in Persons Report: Pakistan](#).

231 Government of Pakistan. (2018). [Prevention of Trafficking in Persons Act, 2018](#), Section 13.

232 Government of Pakistan. (2016). [Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act, 2016](#), Section 46.

233 Government of Pakistan. (1898). [Code of Criminal Procedure \(Act V of 1898\)](#), Section 545.

234 Government of Pakistan. (2021). [Anti-Rape \(Investigation and Trial\) Act, 2021](#). Section 17.

235 PAHCHAAN. (2021). Personal Communication.

236 Ministry of Human Rights, Government of Pakistan. (n.d.). [Human Rights Relief and Revolving Fund](#).

237 Government of Pakistan. (2018). [Islamabad Capital Territory Child Protection Act \(No. XXI of 2018\)](#), Section 26.

238 PAHCHAAN. (2021). Personal Communication.

process and can therefore be regarded as a weak area in the legal protection of children. These provisions are also inconsistent with the gender-neutral definitions used in the international legal instruments to which Pakistan is a party.

Regarding the criminalization of SEC manifestations, Pakistan especially needs to strengthen the legal framework governing SECTT and CEFM in the country. SECTT offences have not been explicitly defined or criminalized and there are no regulations for the tourism industry. As a result, it would be difficult to hold private-sector liable for SECTT related offences and successful prosecution would largely depend on judicial interpretations. Further, there are no provisions that regulate the use of international volunteers in childcare institutions. Regarding CEFM, legislation seems to be particularly weak. Owing to inconsistencies in the general law and Sharia law, and the lack of stringent penalties, the practice of child marriage persists unabated in the country.

Although the current legislation in Pakistan related to OCSE is quite comprehensive, it fails to explicitly criminalize viewing/access of CSAM, attending pornographic performances involving children, and the live streaming of child sexual abuse. In the absence of explicit provisions, the burden lies with the prosecution to bring a charge under the existing laws, to prosecute offenders for these offences. The legislation also does not define and criminalize the sale of children in line with the OPSC.

The procedural laws relating to SEC also suffer from several weaknesses. The Extradition Law does not ensure extradition for OPSC offences, as they are not listed as extraditable offences in the law itself. This does not ensure Pakistan's compliance with its obligations on extradition under the OPSC. Further, the existing national reporting and referral mechanisms are inadequate to combat SEC. There are no mandatory duties regarding SEC under the existing laws, and few provisions to ensure child-sensitive justice and the right to recovery and rehabilitation of the child victims, at the federal level. Additionally, some of the existing laws in this context are gender-biased, although some provincial level laws partially address these gaps.

DISCUSSION

GENDER NORMS

This study focused on the sexual exploitation and abuse of boys in Pakistan, but it is acknowledged that this issue must be viewed within the wider context of gender-based sexual violence that also impacts women, girls, and people from gender minorities. Vulnerabilities of boys and young men are related to patriarchal social and gender norms and expectations that impact all people – though they play out in different ways for different groups.

Pakistan social norms are influenced by patriarchal norms and gender norms present that males are characterised by strength, dominance, authoritativeness, and the ability to protect themselves and others; social and economic space is also frequently controlled by men.²³⁹ Under such rigidly defined gender norms, boys are led to ignore or minimise emotional pain, and refrain from help-seeking. Anger may be one of the few socially acceptable emotions.²⁴⁰ The surveyed frontline support workers confirmed the impact of social and gender norms and in fact noted in the presenting issues that boys tended to be referred for support for anger and acting out behaviours.

Boys enjoy more freedoms than girls in Pakistan, however the resulting reduced supervision and assumptions of agency may paradoxically contribute to vulnerability. For example, a sense that girls require protection but that boys can protect themselves results in far more boys in child labor and street situations to assist in contributing to family incomes. In these settings they are vulnerable to sexual exploitation, with

Pakistani boy laborers recorded as subjected to sexual exploitation in factories, mines, and workshops.²⁴¹ In these settings, boys may concurrently be exposed to physical violence and labor exploitation.²⁴² Again, survey participants in this study reiterated the links between sexual exploitation of boys and child labor. Boys faced risks of harm from “*the people, machines, and tools which may hurt them*” (R423).

Research has previously identified that boys are sexually exploited in prostitution in Pakistan.²⁴³ Gender norms also play a role in sanctioning this occurrence, as the psychological and physical impacts on boys are minimised in comparison to girls – where chasteness is prized and the risk of pregnancy exists.²⁴⁴

Gender norms and boys

Frontline support workers surveyed in this research confirmed the frequent and varied impacts of gender norms on the boys that they work with, and how they made boys and young men simultaneously more vulnerable to CSEA and less likely to be identified as victims. Norms contributed to a feeling of isolation for boy survivors, with stigma, shame, and discomfort discussing sexual issues contributing to their silence and preventing help-seeking; “*the stigmas against [seeking] help for sexual abuse and [the] negative attitude of people toward [boys] needing help, develops fears about [the repercussions of] seeking help.*” (R209) The relationship between gender norms and sexual exploitation for boys is complex and attention must be paid to research to better understand these connections and to the gendered consequences of being exploited.²⁴⁵

239 Save the Children Sweden. (2005). *Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children. A situation Analysis of Pakistan*. 20.

240 Frederick, J. (2010). *Sexual Abuse and Exploitation of Boys in South Asia: A Review of Research Findings, 19 Legislation, Policy and Programme Responses*. UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre. Florence.

241 US Department of Labor. (2019). *2019 Findings on the Worst Forms of Labor: Pakistan*. 2.

242 Frederick, J. (2010). *Sexual Abuse and Exploitation of Boys in South Asia: A Review of Research Findings, 19 Legislation, Policy and Programme Responses*. UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre. Florence.

243 *Ibid.*

244 Slugget, C. (2003). *Mapping of psychosocial support for girls and boys affected by child sexual abuse in four countries in South and Central Asia*. Save the Children Sweden-Denmark.

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

Support workers described social issues, fear and distrust of others and mental health concerns as common problems that boy survivors eventually sought help for. Gender norms which hold that boys are strong, independent and invulnerable can powerfully discourage help-seeking for such concerns and even foster a sense of shame.²⁴⁶ Fears that disclosure reinforce failure to live-up to gender norms fosters distrust in disclosure and thus; *“They [boys] feel that they cannot trust anyone.”* (R156)

The surveyed workers also noted a range of internalised emotional impacts in the boy clients they supported – these included anxiety, symptoms of PTSD, depression, and suicidal ideation; *“miserable psychological and physical conditions”* (R157). These findings concur with a recent systematic review of global research on the sexual exploitation of boys – with poor mental health outcomes identified as one of the more prominently connected impacts identified (along with homelessness, substance misuse and other adverse childhood experiences).²⁴⁷

Workers also identified that fears and concerns related to future sexual relationships were amongst boys’ worries, that they will no longer *“be able to enjoy sex again in life when they grow up”* (R318) and that *“they [won’t be able to] have sex with their [future] wife.”* (R209) Other fears were related to concerns about the repercussions of identifying offenders, particularly relevant when offenders are known and hold authority over the child - such as from within family or community – which were also the most commonly observed relationships of offenders to the victimized boys.

Survey respondents importantly noted the need to normalize in Pakistan that men and boys are vulnerable to sexual violence; *“prove that men are not strong, [that] they are [as] emotional and weak as women.”* (R478) While the core message here is noted, the choice of language used to describe vulnerability (i.e., that males, and females by extension, are ‘weak’) may reflect a common way that vulnerability is understood and communicated. This language may be problematic for either gender, but especially for men and boys, where gender norms and expectations

prescribe that men and boys should strive to avoid being perceived as “weak” at all costs. The evidence highlights the need to develop trauma-informed ways of thinking about and responding to the experience of sexual exploitation with boys and young men.

Gender norms and society

Gender norms not only impact boys, but also the people tasked to protect them, including family, community members, law enforcement officers, and support workers. The surveyed support workers observed a direct link between gender norms and vulnerability to CSEA. One worker described that *“because boys are considered to be strong and independent, they are left to fend for themselves, even if they complain they are in danger”* (R358). Another respondent also commented on how gender norms minimise the seriousness with which instances of sexual exploitation are viewed; *“there is a huge gap and stigma on sexual exploitation of boys in Pakistan, in the cultural context, it is a taboo and most of the time not even considered as an important issue to discuss.”* (R368)

When it occurs, blame and punitive responses persist, with boys being held responsible for the abuse they are subjected to by adult offenders: *“In my experience, most boys have not talked about it as they are not given room to discuss their problems. They are isolated and cornered by their own adults because in Pakistani households, boys look up to their fathers as a support and protection system. So, not having any awareness or training on how to deal with such an issue, the fathers or elders punish or play the blame game on the boy being victimized.”* (R368) Another support worker remarked on how family responses may favour silence to prevent shame falling on the family: *“The family will not listen and try to hide matters, he fears being beaten by the family... Family honour hurts.”* (R80)

Finally, gender norms can result in law and justice professionals dismissing complaints from boys, or even criminalizing the victims. It may be assumed that boys are responsible for their ‘choices’. In the survey, support workers identified referral and collaboration with law enforcement as part of the

246 ECPAT International. (2021). [Global Boys Initiative: A global review of existing literature on the sexual exploitation of boys](#). ECPAT International. 18.

247 *Ibid.*

solution, however, considering parallel low trust in these systems, such engagement could have negative repercussions for boys. For example, same-sex sexual relations are criminalized in Pakistan under Section 377 of the Penal Code, so boys sexually exploited by a male offender may justifiably fear self-incrimination if they are to disclose abuse and seek help – a situation that empowers offenders with impunity.

VULNERABILITIES

The survey data identified that a sizeable proportion of boys experienced sexual exploitation at a young age - 21% before 5 years old and 36% between 5 and 10 years. This contrasts for example with data for Sri Lanka where the corresponding figures were 10% and 23%²⁴⁸ and South Korea where it was 8% and 24%.²⁴⁹ This trend deserves exploration, but on face value, should also be considered immediately in developing child protection, prevention and support strategies focused on boys. The data also indicated that 73% of cases involved male offenders, and 27% involved female offenders. While offenders may have included both those committing offence and facilitators, this data still challenges assumptions about who poses risks to boys. Finally, offenders were predominantly Pakistan nationals. As with other countries in South Asia, visibility of the sexual abuse of boys in tourism settings is higher, yet the numbers here indicate that boys are most likely to be at risk by a person from not only their own country, but from within their family or community.

Labor exploitation

It is well-established that poverty²⁵⁰ increases vulnerability of children to sexual exploitation and the survey data from this study emphasises that economic factors like poverty, economic migration, and living or working on the streets are common vulnerabilities. Workers described that financial pressures on boys force them into circumstances where they are powerless to refuse further exploitation, including from violence

and sexual abuse. Imbalances of power, often acknowledged as being essential for creating and sustaining the conditions in which children are exploited and abused, are common, leaving exploited boys emotionally or economically dependent and powerless:

“The perpetrator always holds some kind of power over the victim, increasing their dependence [on the offender], as the exploitative relationship develops. Whilst age may be the most obvious, this power imbalance can also be due to a range of other factors including gender, sexual identity, intellect, physical strength, status and access to economic or other resources” (R423).

Programming must thus consider the intersectional nature of exploitation. Labor and sexual exploitation may blend. Boys who are reliant upon adults for income, shelter, or other essential needs may have little or no control over their circumstances.

Harmful sexual behavior by other children

Survey data indicated that workers frequently were observing sexual exploitation of boys by other relatives under the age of 18 years (25% of workers noted this as a common relationship). Harmful sexual behaviours between children can be difficult to detect, often overlooked, and sometimes dismissed as play between children.²⁵¹ Discomfort discussing sex and limited access to accurate and age-appropriate information to children can exacerbate these risks – as without knowledge, children explore curiosity, or may be easily coerced. Initiatives to protect and support all children, including boys, will need to take this reality into account.

Hidden and neglected vulnerabilities

There are notable gaps in the vulnerabilities identified by workers. Research has established the connection between vulnerability to

248 ECPAT International. (2021). [Global Boys Initiative: Sri Lanka Report](#).

249 ECPAT International. (2021). [Global Boys Initiative: South Korea Report](#).

250 ECPAT International. (2016). [Power, Impunity and Anonymity](#), 43.

251 NSPCC. (2017). [Research briefing: harmful sexual behaviour](#).

child sexual exploitation and disabilities.^{252,253} Additionally, there is markedly less accessible information for children with disabilities.²⁵⁴ Yet only three participants identified disability as a key vulnerability in the survey. Similarly, just five respondents (8%) considered diverse sexual or gender identity as a key vulnerability in Pakistan. Research indicates these young people are likely especially vulnerable directly, or indirectly as they experience family rejection, homelessness, and discrimination within the community and also from law enforcement and service providers.²⁵⁵ 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.

Discomfort Discussing Sex

Widespread discomfort discussing issues related to sex and sexuality frequently arise in the survey data. These circumstances can lead to considerable pressure on survivors not to disclose abuse from the sheer difficulty of raising it with adults. It also impacts responses to disclosures that shame or blame survivors, or favour keeping concerns quiet or 'within the family to protect honour'.²⁵⁶

"There are many reasons why it's difficult to speak about child sexual abuse, especially as it affects our own lives, or the lives of those we care about... Other obstacles include doubting our own perceptions, being afraid to accuse someone falsely, and being unable or unwilling to go through the pain that can stem from acknowledging that someone we care about is being abused or is abusing." (R423)

Workers noted that this situation also results in children not being able to access information. Basic, age-appropriate sex education is infrequently available – including learning about bodily autonomy and what is and is not appropriate engagement for children.

Sensitivities surrounding 'sex education' no doubt exist, yet such education does not have to be complex biological information. Examples of communicating these simple messages about bodily autonomy to children can be found.²⁵⁷

Alternatively, supplementing 'life skills education' as a compromise can be equally effective; *"life-skills based education tackles the sex education part where age-appropriate information is provided to children. We conduct informative lectures in schools (and plan on doing these in colleges 11/12 grade) to increase awareness regarding sexual abuse and the rights of children. Moreover, lectures with boys focus on the part where expressions of feelings such as grief, shame, and helplessness are talked about."* (R258)

DISCLOSURE AND IDENTIFYING BOYS

Workers described that boys subjected to sexual exploitation were commonly referred to social services for behavioural issues like running away from home, bullying or getting into fights. Yet these issues often masked (or were a result of) other complex experiences. Rather than acknowledge vulnerability, boys may choose to double-down on their expression of gender norms and act out – a behavioural cue that something is wrong.

Due to the relative agency and autonomy that boys are given, support workers described struggling to identify boy victims. Many of the boys within their caseloads were embedded in complex environments where violence, including sexual violence, can be normalized. Even for boys themselves, sexual violence can therefore become a seemingly normal part of their everyday struggle to survive. As a few participants noted, in some cases, boys can be quite matter of fact about their experiences, without labelling violence as exploitation: *"[boys] have no idea*

252 NSPCC. (2019). *Parents' and carers' views on how we can work together to prevent the sexual abuse of disabled children.*

253 United Nations Children's Fund. (2020). *Research on the Sexual Exploitation of Boys: Findings, ethical considerations and methodological challenges.* UNICEF, New York.

254 Save the Children & Handicap International. (2011). *Out from the shadows: sexual violence against children with disabilities.*

255 United Nations Children's Fund. (2020). *Research on the Sexual Exploitation of Boys: Findings, ethical considerations and methodological challenges.* UNICEF, New York.

256 ECPAT International. (2017). *Through the Eyes of the Child: Barriers to Access to Justice and Remedies for Child Victims of Sexual Exploitation.* 88.

257 See: NSPCC's *Talk PANTS with Pantosaurus.*

[about] sexual exploitation, but they [have been] sexually exploited by many people, many times.” (R28)

In cases such as these, boys (as with girls) may manifest psychological distress through the presentation of physical symptoms, which may also be commonly misunderstood. One support worker noted that boys *“sometimes come up with physiological issues such as headaches, abdominal pains, etc., which diverts the attention from the [actual] issues they are suffering with.”* (R317)

Support workers described a range of methods that boys employed to indirectly disclose – by being noticed without deliberately disclosing that they need support. This includes depersonalizing their experiences as though it happened to someone else, laughing about it, or making jokes about experiences of CSEA, while also outwardly denying that anything is wrong. Similar experiences have been noted in other country reports for the Global Boys Initiative for Sri Lanka,²⁵⁸ South Korea,²⁵⁹ and Hungary.²⁶⁰

Even in situations where a boy may wish to seek support, services may not be sufficiently visible and accessible, and the pursuit of justice is not perceived as a realistic option: *“There is no knowledge of availability of support services and no finance for court proceedings.”* (R446) Another respondent also highlighted boys’ limited understanding of their rights as a significant issue preventing them from acknowledging their own victimization *“[there is] a lack of awareness about abuse and neglect, [boys] don’t know about [their] own legal rights.”* (R145) The lack of reporting - undoubtedly influenced by lack of visibility and discomfort discussing sexual topics is also acknowledged as a challenge identifying and connecting with victimized boys, as one respondent explained: *“most of the cases are not reported so it’s difficult to find them to help them and not [go] against the family honour.”* (R80)

Several support workers seemed to place responsibility for the difficulty in identifying victimized boys with the existing quality of services (rated mostly as fair or poor). One

remarked that *“[there is] no awareness - some NGOs working, but on government or community level nothing [is] done for this problem”* (R80), while another acknowledged that *“cases are mostly not reported due to the lack of awareness”* (R302). Others commented on the need for better *“education for service providers”* (R358) and the need for *“strict supervision of service providers, proper training and adequate resources.”* (R366)

Capacity and institutional challenges

Support workers both describe and demonstrate the need for a better understanding of the dynamics, vulnerabilities, and consequences of sexual exploitation and abuse of boys. Throughout responses to the practical child protection scenarios, support workers commonly focused their attention on responses that placed at least some responsibility on the child victims for the offenders’ illegal behaviours. This is particularly seen in scenarios in which the child might have appeared to be a willing participant. For example, in the scenario where Kashif (a child aged 17) ‘agreed’ to be filmed naked, many responses tended to focus on blaming the child, correcting his *“bad behaviour”* or informing him *“that he is wrong”* (R99), or that his actions *“are not good and acceptable by society.”* (R167) This is similarly seen in scenarios in which children demonstrate agency, such as with 15-year old Majid who describes his offenders as his *“boyfriends”* and said that sex with the adults is his choice. Nearly a third believed that Majid was not exploited, with one noting that the CSEA occurred *“with his consent”* (R248). It should be emphasised that it is never a child’s fault when an adult offender subjects them to abuse, regardless of any circumstances. It is adults’ responsibility.

Globally, research shows that social support workers are seeking knowledge and skills to help them identify, understand, and respond to boys who have been subjected to sexual exploitation,²⁶¹ and Pakistan appears to be no exception. There is a need for paradigm-shifting inputs of training to help support services shift this narrative towards gender-sensitive support services for boys.

258 ECPAT International. (2021). [Global Boys Initiative: Sri Lanka Report](#).

259 ECPAT International. (2021). [Global Boys Initiative: South Korea Report](#).

260 ECPAT International. (2022). [Global Boys Initiative: Hungary Report](#).

261 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).

Workers overwhelmingly rated the quality and availability of medical, psychological, legal and reintegration support as only fair or poor. Further comments revealed human resource factors; *“Sometimes the staff and persons dealing with such cases aren’t trained or recruited in a proper way - a major loophole for quality assurance”* (R368). Others remarked on regulatory and oversight issues *“Lack of government in making policies and procedures to regulate such institutions”* (R446) and the low priority placed on potential victimization of boys for sexual exploitation.

Suggested responses and solutions for overcoming these quality constraints were relatively limited, focusing largely on the need for social and institutional development, with the most common solution related to “increasing awareness” and the need for general awareness raising across the community about boys possible vulnerability to sexual exploitation. However, it should be noted that while awareness-raising is needed, to bring about change, the effectiveness of awareness-raising alone is limited if it is not part of a broader strategy – which includes specialized training for service providers and male-focused (or intentionally inclusive) support services for boys. Raising awareness alone will increase expectations and potentially lead to more disclosures, thus increasing demand on existing services.

One respondent, reflecting on potential solutions for the quality issues impacting support services illustrated that there are no quick fixes, and a comprehensive response is necessary:

“Parents should talk with their children about sexual harassment and provide them [with] information about good and bad touch and sexual abuse. The children from lower class families are bounded and can’t take appropriate steps against their abuser, so the government should provide enough protection and pass laws for their help. The government should punish abusers in an appropriate way because the others will learn and avoid as well... the most important thing to do is the government should arrange free psychological therapy treatment for those who are victims and abusers, both... and those others who can’t afford treatment and psychological help.” (R209)

PROTECTING CHILDREN WITHIN A CONTEXT OF FAITH

While the data highlights some of the unique child protection risks and challenges in Pakistan, it is also crucial to highlight some of the potential opportunities possible. Faith communities likely need to be a key part of the child protection solutions in Pakistan. Several support workers expressed the importance of integrating the values of child protection with Islamic values and communicating these principles through public media campaigns, including the need to *“run a media campaign about [child] rights to show Islamic and religious points for [children’s] rights.”* (R145). Consideration of what Islamic values can offer to child protection, and how we can theologically support ALL children to ensure that they receive protection and care and develop holistic and inclusive responses that nurture children spiritually, as well as psychologically, socially, and emotionally.

Theologians hold that the sacredness of children's lives is enshrined as a central value in Islam, affirming that all children are a blessing in the eyes of God. Islam speaks warmly of the relationships between parents and children and encourages open expressions of love and mercy between them.²⁶² With regard to the social and economic needs of children, Islam also specifies the various duties of parents in providing food, clothing, medical care, and education for their children.

Several support workers naturally reached for faith-based responses to the challenging moral and ethical problems posed by the discovery or disclosure of CSEA in families and religious communities. They described the need to *"educate children in Islamic ways"* (R90) and *"take Islamic education to all"* (R99). Another noted more universally that *"everything and every person should follow Islamic rules."* (R40) Others noted apparent tensions between the sacred and secular worlds, as they attempted to respond in the best interests of the child.

"I think the major reason for this phenomenon is not the stigma of sex, taboos, etc, but the exposure to sexual factors, where women are moving almost naked in society. If she does not follow the religious and social rules of hijab, then she is sensitizing the opposite gender for sexuality. It makes people mentally sick, and they even want sex with the same gender. Consequently, innocent children become prey to this." (R466)

The quote above demonstrates that while there is potential for meaningful engagement with Islam in terms of child protection, there are also risks to be negotiated as some theological responses can exacerbate blaming or judgemental responses. Islam holds child protection as a sacred duty of the parent and holds that the protection of vulnerable children is a social responsibility of the community.²⁶³ These precepts are crucial and should be thoughtfully considered and integrated, in partnership with religious leaders, in the important work needed to protect boys and girls from the harms that child sexual exploitation and abuse represent.

262 Giladi, Avner. (2014). *The Nurture and Protection of Children in Islam: Perspectives from Islamic Sources.*

263 Ridho, M. (2015). *Islamic Perspectives on Child Protection.*

RECOMMENDATIONS

LEARNING 1:

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

- Build up the comfort and confidence of social support workers to discuss the sexual exploitation of boys. Embed essential learning on the sexual exploitation of boys within existing professional training and orientation materials.
- Develop parenting programs to create awareness on CSEA and boys vulnerability to CSEA and provide online support to parents in order to be able to discuss with their children without shame or apprehension.
- 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 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 2:

Intersectional vulnerabilities may make some boys disproportionately vulnerable to sexual exploitation and abuse.

- Establish a child protection institute or community of practice (locally and nationally), to share experience, knowledge and develop guidance, strategy, learning, and practice related to sexual exploitation and abuse of boys across the workforce of child protection practitioners.
- 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.
- Ensure access to child protection services is available to all children in all contexts, inclusive of environments where boys are noted to be at risk, including labor and employment settings, entertainment venues, schools, religious institutions and in street-based environments. Practitioners and frontline workers can take guidance from the **Contextual Safeguarding Network** about how to engage with different people on this topic.
- Discriminatory attitudes remain regarding gender and sexuality may prohibit children who are subjected to sexual exploitation from disclosing and seeking help. Work to reduce these attitudes must continue. Pakistan adopted the Transgender Persons Act in 2018 which provides protections for transgender people from discrimination and harassment, which should be applauded.

LEARNING 3:

Discomfort discussing sex and sexuality are key barriers preventing children from reaching out, being seen, and receiving the support they need.

- Actively participate with child and youth groups, and utilize technology to develop learning materials, resources, and initiatives for children to safely access information related to sexual development, their rights to protection, and their right to live a life free of exploitation and abuse. These materials should be embedded within existing life skill initiatives and be inclusive of all children and young people, including boys, girls, those with diverse sexual orientation and gender identity, marginalised children and children with disabilities.
- Provide education for caregivers on recognizing behavioural indicators of children who may be subjected to sexual exploitation and abuse, how to appropriately support boys. Caregivers should also be provided with resources for how to talk with children about difficult subjects. Guidance could come from the NSPCC's Pantosaurus Initiative.
- Children may be reluctant to seek sex-related information and advice from adults or may resort to seeking answers online which may be confusing or outright damaging. Social workers, teachers and other trusted adults should be made aware of reliable and accurate online sources of information which they must then be encouraged to inform children of.
- Children may be more comfortable talking to young adults. Peer groups and youth groups should be involved in creating awareness around CSEA and discussions with children. However, care must be taken that these groups are on the one hand supported to provide accurate and practical advice and on the other monitored to protect children within these groups from any harm.

LEARNING 4:

There are critical gaps in data, knowledge, and learning which restrict development of male sensitive and inclusive child protection responses.

- There is a clear need for up-to-date qualitative and participatory research with boys at risk of and affected by CSEA on a range of issues related to their victimization. Research that highlights the perspectives of boys should be prioritized. Findings should be used to guide the development of a range of gender sensitive and trauma-informed prevention, protection, and support initiatives, for children - and their families and communities. This should include but not be limited to:
 - Examination of particular contexts where boys are vulnerable (i.e. labor, 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.
- Research with frontline workers, and evaluation of existing services are required and should be prioritized, to contribute to the development of inclusive, gender- and trauma-informed learning for practitioners:
 - Assess needs in relation to CSEA knowledge and skills, and working with boys, amongst child protection practitioners;

- Monitoring of child protection programming could be improved. This could include the implementation of systematic, disaggregated national data collection regarding supported children;
- Develop and implement mechanisms to evaluate the effectiveness of awareness-raising and prevention operations.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR LEGAL CHANGES

- Sign and ratify 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).
- Adopt a uniform legal definition of the term ‘child’ across all federal and provincial legislation. In line with international standards, a child should be defined as any person below 18 years of age.
- Review the effectiveness and enforcement of laws related to employment, as children under the age of 14 years, especially boys, are often placed at significant risk of sexual exploitation and abuse within work environments.
- Amend the Penal Code to ensure provisions related to sexual exploitation – such as Section 366A (related to procurement of minor girls) and Section 366B (related to the offence of importation of a girl under 21 years old from a foreign country for illicit intercourse) – are not gendered and equally protect children of all genders.
- Review and amend provincial laws that only protect girls, including Section 40 of the Punjab Destitute and Neglected Children’s Act, 2004 and The Punjab Suppression of Prostitution Ordinance, 1961, which prohibits prostitution and contains specific offences related to the exploitation of children in prostitution - but only in relation to girls.
- Amend the Child Marriage Restraint Act, 1929, to ensure that female offenders are also punished for committing offences relating to child marriage. Further, increase penalties associated with such offences to effectively work as a deterrence measure.
- Amend the Penal Code to ensure boys are also protected from forced marriage.
- Review and update existing legislation in relation to OCSEA to ensure its comprehensiveness and harmony with international instruments; specifically, criminalize the viewing of, and access to CSAM, and forms of OCSEA other than CSAM such as live streaming of child sexual abuse, online grooming of children for sexual purposes and sexual extortion committed in/facilitated through Internet and communications technologies.
- Establish by law the duty for Internet service providers to report, block, and remove CSAM, and report behaviour harmful to children to the relevant authorities.
- Review legislation to ensure that tourism industry companies are obligated by law to adhere to specific national codes for child protection; and ensure that tour operators are obliged by law to include warnings against the illegality of SECTT-related conduct in all their informative/marketing/promotional materials.
- The existing federal provisions related to child sensitive justice, and the right to recovery and rehabilitation of child victims are inadequate and need revision. In addition, some of the existing laws are gender biased and would benefit from some revision.



328/1 Phaya Thai Road, Ratchathewi, Bangkok, 10400 THAILAND
Tel: +662 215 3388 | Email: info@ecpat.org
Website: www.ecpat.org