

Sexual abuse of boys often overlooked by state laws, global study warns

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Stronger support urged for young men affected by abuse as researchers find existing measures tailored towards girls

Sexual abuse of boys is “barely addressed” by the laws in many countries, according to a global study that warns of a lack of support for young male survivors.

[The study](#), which examined child rape laws in 40 countries, found that just under half of jurisdictions lacked legal protections for boys. In many cases, laws were specific to girls and did not recognise boys as victims.

Researchers also identified a tendency for support services, including shelters and legal aid, to be geared towards women and girls.

“Often this is bundled up into an issue of violence against women, and therefore it is catering to girls rather than boys,” said Katherine Stewart, a consultant for Economist Intelligence Unit, which produced the report.

It is estimated that 18% of girls and 8% of boys globally have experienced childhood sexual abuse, [according to a study](#) conducted in 2011. However, abuse among boys is thought to be higher in some countries, such as Kenya, where a [Unicef study](#) found that two in every 10 men experienced abuse in childhood.

Social stigma, macho stereotypes and homophobia all contribute towards boys being less likely to report abuse, according to the report. The authors suggested that boys should be given tools and terminology that allow them to feel more comfortable reporting abuse or exploitation.

The report, which ranked countries according to how well they are confronting child sexual abuse and exploitation, warned that tackling abuse should be a global priority.

Greater internet access, combined with the growth of young populations in many countries, has increased the number of children at risk, the report said. Heightened instability due to armed conflict or climate change has also placed children in more danger.

According to the rankings, Britain, Sweden and Canada are the countries tackling abuse most effectively. Pakistan, Egypt and Mozambique were rated at the bottom of the list.

Across all countries, researchers found limited data on the prevalence of child abuse and exploitation. Only half of countries have produced or endorsed data on the proportion of the population that has experienced child abuse. Only five collect such data on child sexual exploitation, a form of abuse where a child receives gifts, money or affection in return for sexual activity.

In some cases, countries only collected data on girls who had experienced abuse, or did not specify the gender of the victim.

The report found that the UK had improved reporting among men, with cases in England and Wales climbing from 3,819 in 2006-07 to 12,130 in 2016-17, according to the Office for National Statistics. This was prompted by increased awareness following the #MeToo campaign and high-profile cases reported in the media, such as the child sexual abuse scandal in English football.

India was cited as having the best legal framework to protect victims, due partly to the 2012 [Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act](#), which focuses on protecting boys as well as girls from sexual violence. According to a [government survey](#), more than 50% of children in India have experienced one or more forms of sexual abuse.

The report described child abuse as a largely silent epidemic. [Research suggests](#) 120 million girls have been subjected to some form of sexual abuse, but [only a tiny proportion](#) - 1% - of rape survivors have sought professional help.

The study was developed by the Economist Intelligence Unit with support from the World Childhood Foundation, Oak Foundation and the Carlson Family Foundation.

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The Guardian

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