

# Breaking the Silence

*on Sexual Violence against Boys in India*



*Protecting and empowering children since 1989*



**Family**  
for every child

**Authors**

Jayaraj KP  
Rita Panicker

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Butterflies  
163/4, Pradhan Wali Gali, Village Jaunapur,  
New Delhi - 110047. INDIA  
Tel.+91 99993 21098  
E-mail : [butterfliesngo@gmail.com](mailto:butterfliesngo@gmail.com)  
Website : [www.butterfliesngo.org](http://www.butterfliesngo.org)

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+91 7503000790

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## Abbreviations

AIDS	-	Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome
CCL	-	Children in Conflict with Law
CPO	-	Child Protection Officer
CWC	-	Child Welfare Committee
DCPU	-	District Child Protection Unit
ECF	-	Equal Community Foundation
EI	-	Extended Interview
FGD	-	Focus Group Discussion
GoI	-	Government of India
HIV	-	Human Immunodeficiency Virus
II	-	Informant Interview
JJ Act	-	Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection) Act, 2015
JJB	-	Juvenile Justice Board
KSCF	-	Kailash Satyarthi Children's Foundation
KII	-	Key Informant Interview
MSM	-	Male having Sex with Male
NCRB	-	National Crime Record Bureau
POCSO Act	-	Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act, 2012
TB-CBT	-	Trauma-Based Cognitive Behaviour Therapy
UN CRC	-	United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child

# Glossary

## **Child**

In this study child means every human being below the age of eighteen defined under Article 1 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC).

## **Child Sexual Abuse**

Child sexual abuse is the involvement of a child in sexual activity that he or she does not fully comprehend, is unable to give informed consent to, or for which the child is not developmentally prepared and cannot give consent, or that violates the laws or social taboos of society. Child sexual abuse is evidenced by this activity between a child and an adult or another child who by age or development is in a relationship of responsibility, trust or power, the activity being intended to gratify or satisfy the needs of the other person. This may include but is not limited to:

- the inducement or coercion of a child to engage in any unlawful sexual activity;
- the exploitative use of a child in prostitution or other unlawful sexual practices;
- the exploitative use of children in pornographic performance and materials

(WHO Consultation on Child Abuse Prevention, 1999).



## **Harmful Sexual Behaviour**

Harmful sexual behaviour of children is sexual activity where one individual has not consented, or where their relationship includes an imbalance of power, for example due to age, intellectual ability, physical ability or impairment (disability), or physical strength (Family for Every Child, 2017).

The harm caused may be physical and/or emotional / psychological even though the behaviour is sexual in nature. The child with harmful sexual behaviour may use grooming, coercion or threats to influence the other person to comply with their wishes, or they may use force. This term is useful because it is not appropriate to label a child's behaviour as abusive or criminal. However, it is important to intervene to protect the rights of other children and to support the child with sexual harmful behaviour to take responsibility for changing their behaviour. It is important to understand that the child with sexual harmful behaviour is due to an underlying vulnerability (Family for Every Child, 2017).

## **Problematic Sexual Behaviour**

Children's sexual behaviour may be problematic, even if it is not yet causing harm to others. Problematic sexual behaviour is behaviour that is a cause for concern in terms of the child's age or developmental stage, according to the context. For instance, knowledge of sexual acts, or use of sexually explicit, words or acts. Children's behaviour may be seen as problematic if the behaviour is recurrent (Family for Every Child, 2017).

Without intervention, problematic sexual behaviour may pose a risk to the child or others. For example bullying, stigmatisation, development of the child's sexual identity and vulnerability to sexual abuse. It may also be disturbing for others.

Problematic sexual behaviour can be divided into 'self-focused behaviour' and 'interpersonal behaviour'. Self-focussed behaviour may include compulsive masturbation and excessive interest in

pornography. Interpersonal sexual behaviour may include sexual games with friends, sharing pornography and spying on others. The behaviour of some children, especially younger children, may not be considered as problematic yet. Factors to consider include whether it is spontaneous, not recurrent, the child has no inhibition and can stop the behaviour (Family for Every Child, 2017).

### **Victim (of sexual abuse)**

A boy (under 18 years) who has been forced or persuaded to take part in sexual activities.

### **Actor (of sexual violence)**

A boy (under 18 years) who has displayed harmful sexual behaviour and consensually involved in sexual exploration, or forcefully violates another sexually.

### **Masculinity**

Masculinity refers to the socially produced but embodied ways of being male. Its manifestations include manners of speech, behaviour, gestures, social interaction, a division of tasks ‘proper’ to men and women (‘men work in offices, women do housework’), and an overall narrative that positions it as superior to its perceived antithesis, femininity (Srivastava, 2012, p. 13).

### **Sexuality**

Sexuality refers to the bundle of social phenomena including the level of the individual that shape erotic life (Seidman, Fischer and Meeks, 2011). This definition but does not dismiss the biological preconditions of sexuality.

# Introduction and Background of the Study

There is a growing body of knowledge on children, childhood, gender and sexuality. However, research to understand the intersection between masculinity and sexuality in (re)producing meaning and childhood sexual experiences including sexual abuse of boys as well as harmful sexual behaviour of boys are few and far between (Burke, 1998; Connell and Masserschmidt, 2005; Sharma, 2015; Family for Every Child, 2017). Although studies on child sexual abuse inspired by the feminist movement and child rights activism of the 1970s and 80s built an understanding about the social problem (Finkelhor, 1979; Angelides, 2004; Whittier 2009), by and large the focus of the research was on girls and their experiences. This thrust consequently ignored even the possibility of sexual abuse among boys. As a result, sexual violence against boys has remained as a hidden area for years.

**Recognizing this, Family for Every Child<sup>1</sup> took an initiative to conduct a scoping study based on the discussions in a practice exchange meeting on sexual abuse in Manila, Philippines in 2017. The practice exchange** was attended by practitioners from Cambodia, India, Indonesia, Nepal and the Philippines. The scoping study addressed questions on sexual abuse and exploitation of boys, harmful sexual behaviour of boys, and existing interventions, by using secondary literature and key informant interviews. It recommended a primary research to build context-specific knowledge on childhood sexual experiences of boys in the context of masculinities and sexuality. It

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<sup>1</sup>Family for Every Child is a global alliance of local civil society organizations working together to improve the lives of vulnerable children through creating and mobilizing knowledge, skills and resources.

further suggested a focus on sexual abuse of boys and its linkage between the dominant notions of gender, masculinities and sexuality (Family for Every Child, 2017). It was against this backdrop that a project for carrying out context specific studies in India, Cambodia, Philippines and Nepal was initiated to inform policy and practice. As part of the process, an inception meeting of the Directors and researchers of the member organizations was organized by Family for Every Child in February 2018 in Cambodia in the first place and the objectives, methodology and time frame of the study were finalized.

The present study is conceptualized against this background. It focuses on perspectives and childhood sexual experiences of boys in the context of masculinities and sexuality. Mapping the interventions of government as well non-governmental organizations, it further examines different practices and challenges faced in the process of addressing the issues emanating from the dominant notions of masculinities and sexuality in the context of India.

Both, sexual abuse experienced by boys and harmful sexual behaviour of boys are referred to collectively in the report as sexual violence. By considering both in this study the aim is not to imply that one leads to the other. Boys who have experienced sexual abuse and boys who have been actors in harmful sexual behaviour share a number of characteristics, such as sexualised behaviour and using sexual language, as well as risk and resilience factors, which is one reason for considering both in this study. Another reason is that many of the interventions to address child sexual abuse and harmful sexual behaviour of children are delivered by the same service providers, although requiring different approaches. Being part of the Family for Every Child alliance, Butterflies carried out this research in India.

### **A brief note on Butterflies**

Butterflies is a registered voluntary organisation working with street-connected & vulnerable groups of children since 1989 in Delhi. With a rights based, non-institutional approach, the organisation endeavours to educate and impart life skills to street-connected &

vulnerable children so that they become self-reliant. Over the years Butterflies has initiated a number of innovative interventions in the field and partnered with various government and non-government agencies to garner support for the children. The main programmes are Street Formal Education, Children's Development Khazana (life skills programme teaching financial management), Child Health Cooperative (CHC), Child Social Protection Programme, Children' Media (radio, video, newspaper and theatre), Resilience Centre and Childline (1098, 24 hour helpline for children in crisis), and vocational training (includes Butterflies School of Culinary & Catering and Computer Education). A Mental Health Unit is active under the Child Social Protection Programme and works with children and their families in crisis and at risk through case work and family therapeutic interventions ([www.butterfliesngo.org](http://www.butterfliesngo.org)).

# Review of Related Literature

Since there is a paucity of research on sexual experiences of boys, including abusive as well as harmful behaviour, this literature review encompasses available material related to the subject matter drawn from material dealing with sexual abuse in general and sexual abuse and exploitation of boys in particular, children in conflict with law and men and masculinities with a focus on the Indian context. This emphasis helped to address available literature, identify specific gaps and locate empirical evidence within the context, thereby ensuring a contextualized analysis.

## **Childhood sexual experiences of boys: Locating the study in the social context**

Little is known about childhood sexual experiences of boys including abusive as well as harmful sexual behaviours in South Asia. In terms of prevalence, the meta-analysis of Stoltenberg, Van Ijzendoorn, and Bakermans-Kranenburg (2011) found that South Asia has the lowest rates for both girls (113/1000) and boys (41/1000) in comparison with other continents. Collectivist culture in South Asia, wherein honor of the family or community is given primary importance, was cited as a reason for this lower rate of prevalence in the sub-continent (Stoltenberg et al. 2011). This denial and lack of attention is reflected in the body of knowledge as well. However in the wake of sex tourism in the early 1970s and 80s in South Asia, researchers identified boys along with girls who were sexually exploited for commercial purposes in tourism destinations (Fredrick, 2010).

The situation is not very different in India. Although the National Crime Records Bureau [NCRB] shares the cases reported to the legal system, it may not reflect the reality. Cases may be underreported due to the hidden nature of abusive as well as offensive practices, and other issues such as disparate definitions of sexual abuse, methodology and time periods of evaluation followed by research studies (Douglas and Finkelhor, 2005).

Following quantitative survey methodologies, the majority of the studies and reports on child sexual abuse revealed vulnerability of boys to sexual abuse similar to that of girls and thus highlighted it as an issue in the public discourse. Studies of Tulir (2006) and the GOI (2007) were instrumental in the process, as both of them explored higher percentages of boys being sexually abused in comparison with girls. As per the survey of Tulir (2006), out of the total male respondents (847), 48 percent of boys reported sexual abuse while it was 39 percent among girls (1364). Similarly, the GOI report (2007) revealed that out of the total children experiencing one or more forms of sexual abuse (53 percent), 52.94 were boys and 47.06 percent were girls. A survey conducted by Patel and Andrews (2001) among school students in Goa also underlined the incidence of sexual abuse among boys to the same extent experienced by girls. (Out of the total sample of boys, 33 percent reported an experience of sexual abuse). In another survey, Pagare, Meena, Jiloha, and Singh (2005) found that out of the total 189 boys from one of the Observation Homes in Delhi, 38.1 percent disclosed experience of sexual abuse.

In the meantime, researchers addressing the questions of male child sexual abuse and commercial sexual exploitation in particular, broadened the knowledge with details. The inquiries based on clinical (Subramanian, Reddy, Chandra, Rao, and Rao, 2017), institutional-observation homes (Pagare, 2003; Matiyani, 2011) and schools- (Patel and Andrews, 2001) and community settings (EQUATIONS, 2003; EQUATIONS/ECPAT International, 2008; Akula, 2006; Lahiri and Kar, 2007; KP, 2009) contributed in indicating complexities of the reality and its prevalence across different layers of society. In

addition to this information on ‘prevalence’, all the studies explored penetrative as well as non-penetrative forms of abuses experienced by boys from known and un-known adults. Almost all the studies and reports on sexual abuse and commercial sexual exploitation of boys identified men as the perpetrators of abuse while a couple of exceptional inquiries revealed involvement of (older) friends and women as abusers (Patel and Andrews, 2001; Akula, 2006).

Supporting findings from different contexts on disclosure, two empirical analyses found that almost all the boys did not disclose the abusive experiences with anyone, as they got scared and felt guilt and shame after the incidents (KP, 2009; Matiyani, 2011). Even the shared case illustrated that the community did not take the abusive experiences seriously, and soon there after, the boy was given a nickname in relation to the abuser and humiliated by community members especially by men in the locality (KP, 2009). Both studies also revealed the ambiguities around the immediate negative impact of sexual abuse along with noticeable effects such as emotional and psychological issues along with health complications of STIs Patel and Andrews, 2001; Pagare et al., 2005; KP, 2009; Matiyani, 2011; Subramaniyan et al., 2017). In addition, questions of sexual identity were also noticed as effects of the incident (Subramaniyan et al., 2017).

The literature in general ascertained the role of socio-cultural and familial factors in sexual abuse of children. Patriarchy and resultant notions of masculinities were cited as reasons for sexual abuse and barriers for not seeking various services including psychiatric help for boys (GOI, 2007; Carson, Foster and Tripathi, 2013; Sharma, 2015; Subramaniyan et al., 2017). A couple of reports indicated that ‘having sex’ was a masculine expression and proved ‘*mardangi*’ (masculinity) (EQUATIONS, 2003; Lahiri and Kar, 2007). Dominant notions of (hetero) sexuality and childhood (re)produced through institutions were also explained as the driving forces in sexually exploiting boys for commercial purposes (KP, 2009). It was summarized that studies dealt with commercial sexual exploitation



of boys revealed the underlying factors such as poverty, sex tourism and (foreign) paedophilia, urbanization and vulnerability of 'street' & working children and cultural practices<sup>2</sup> for the phenomena (KP, 2016).

Exceptional research studies revealed the life of children in conflict with law by shedding some light on their issues as well as factors predisposing children to offences (Parackal and Panicker, 2016; KSCF, 2017). Covering 18 selected observation and special homes in four states- Delhi, Kerala, Tamil Nadu and Odisha, Parackal and Panicker (2016) found that out of the total 605 study participants, 12.1 percent of juveniles were apprehended and detained for rape (12.6 percent in Delhi). They argued that the compounded and accumulated effects of several factors such as problems in the family, school, peers and community led children to offend. Recent analyses of KSCF (2017) in Delhi revealed multiple factors predisposing children to sexual offences. It was observed that a sub-optimal social life, lack of emotional support and respect towards the opposite sex influenced children to involve in sexual offences.

Materials on men and masculinities seldom grappled with life of boys in India. Researchers generally focussed on sexual behaviour, its linkage with HIV/AIDS, sexual identities of male adults and homo-sociality. However a few studies indicated childhood sexual experiences of male sex workers and Male having Sex with Males (MSM) in their localities as part of their analyses (Khan, 1999, 2008; Joseph, 2004; Osella, 2012). Departing from the dominant literature, Khan (1999, 2008) and Osella (2012) explored negotiating skills of teenagers and their intimate relationships with male adults in varying socio-cultural contexts and thus unpacked multiple meanings of boys beyond abuse and offence.

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<sup>2</sup>As a case in point, in the name of cultural practice, 'launda nach', i.e. popular traditional practice in Northern India wherein young males who dress as females and dance in functions including wedding, boys and young males are often being sexually abused.

The paucity of materials on these topics consequently restricts intervention efforts and documentation of them. Nevertheless, through enactment of the laws on child sexual abuse and children in conflict with law, the state attempted to address these issues within a legal framework. Though both the laws were criticized for some of their provisions, they offered scope for interventions in the social context<sup>3</sup>.

The Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2015<sup>4</sup> (JJ Act, 2015) promulgated to provide ‘comprehensive provisions for children alleged and found to be in conflict with law and children in need of care and protection’; by catering to their developmental needs and adopting a child-friendly approach in the adjudication and disposition of matters in the best interest of children and their ultimate rehabilitation. The Act permits juveniles between the age of 16 and 18 years to be put on trial as adults for heinous offences [including murder and rape]. Juvenile Justice Boards (JJB) and Child Welfare Committees (CWC) have been constituted in each district of the state in which JJB conducts preliminary inquiry to determine whether a juvenile offender is to be sent for rehabilitation or to be tried as an adult while CWC determines institutional care for children in need of care and protection. The Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act, 2012 (POCSO Act, 2012) was enacted to protect children from offences of sexual assault, sexual harassment and pornography. This gender-neutral Act defines a child as any person below 18 years of age and various forms of sexual abuse. The Act offers child-friendly procedures for reporting, recording of evidence, investigation and Special Courts.

However, there have been criticisms of the POCSO Act centred on mandatory reporting, age of consent and inexact determination of age

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<sup>3</sup>Critical engagement with the laws, its provisions, criticisms and implementation demand focused efforts which is beyond the scope of this study.

<sup>4</sup>The Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2000 was repealed and enacted by the Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2015.

(National Law School of India, 2016; Ali, Adenwalla and Puneekar, 2017). A couple of analyses dealing with implementation of the Act revealed procedural issues, lack of awareness among different stakeholders such as police, CWC, District Child Protection Unit (DCPU)<sup>5</sup>, and health care professionals (National Law School of India, 2016; Patkar and Kandula, 2018). Nonetheless, it is important to remember that the focus of the analysis was general rather than on or of boys.

It is apparent from the discussion that the available literature related to the subject matter is limited in exploring the existence of the issue of male child abuse and commercial sexual exploitation, rather than offering a nuanced understanding about childhood sexual experiences including abusive as well as harmful or offensive behaviour (Hunter, 2006; KP, 2016). Methodologies of the inquiries also equally contributed to this as majority of them followed simple random surveys to map the ‘prevalence’ or existence of sexual abuse and commercial exploitation among boys. Thus life situations of boys and their varying experiences (including abusive and offensive) in the context of masculinities and sexuality have remained as an inchoate area in the body of knowledge (Burke, 1998; Sharma, 2015; KP, 2016).

### **Conceptual framework**

Inspired by the ecological theory of human development proposed by Bronfenbrenner (1979), the study follows an ecological framework. According to this framework individuals’ perspectives and experiences are (re)produced through their evolving interaction with the environment. The ecological environment is “conceived as a set of nested structures, each inside the next” (Bronfenbrenner 1979, p.3). Within this nested system, individuals interact with elements of micro, meso, exo and macro systems and their experiences are influenced by the mutual interaction between the layers. Along with the role of

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<sup>5</sup>The DCPU is the focal point to ensure the implementation of JJ, Act 2015 as a nodal agency for child protection in the district, the agency support and coordinates with CWC and JJB for the protection of children.

multiple layers in the environment, the framework acknowledges the fact that through an evolving interaction individuals are capable to construct realities rather than merely representing it. In this regard, the framework perceives children as active social agents who are part of constructing their life scripts with in the environment.

Focusing on the micro system, the framework of the present study perceives varying (including abusive as well as offensive) sexual experiences of boys in the context of masculinities and sexuality as the outcomes of interaction among many factors at four levels—the individual, the relationships, the community, and the societal.

At the individual level, personal history and biological factors influence how individuals behave in life situations. It includes experiences of being a victim of child maltreatment, psychological or personality disorders, alcohol and/or substance abuse and a history of behaving aggressively or having experienced abuse. The immediate surroundings such as family and peers are factors considered of utmost importance in shaping the experiences. As a case in point, having violent friends may influence children to become a victim of violence or involve in aggressive (sexual) acts. Community contexts like neighbourhoods, schools and working environment [for working adolescents] also determine experiences of children. Societal factors in the macro-layer are significant in constructing and challenging the perspectives and experiences of individuals. These include economic and social policies and laws that maintain socio-economic inequalities between people. It includes social and cultural norms around male dominance over women and parental dominance over children. Cultural norms that endorse violence as an acceptable form of practice in situations and to resolve conflicts play an important role.

Based on this background, the research aimed to explore three levels amongst the four levels including individual, personal relation and community contexts. Thus, the study engaged with children, families, community members and professionals to explore the experiences and

perspectives on masculinities and sexuality, which in turn determine or influence the (abusive as well as offensive) sexual experiences of boys.

The study also attempted to understand the experiences of boys through a lens of intersectionality i.e. inter linked structures and processes related to gender, class, caste, age and location. As an important analytical approach that stemmed from black feminism, it provides new angles of vision on social phenomena thereby informing social justice projects as a critical praxis (Collins, 2015). Taking cues from it, efforts were made to unfold discrete experiences of boys on the basis of age, gender-conforming practices and socio-economic status.

# Research Methods

## Research Questions

The research is intended to answer the following questions:

1. What does it mean to be a male child and what are their lived experiences in the context of sexuality and masculinities?
2. How are masculinity and sexuality socially constructed?
3. How do boys and those around them perceive masculinity and sexuality and how does this impact them?
4. What are the links between the dominant notions of sexuality and masculinity and sexual abuse of boys?
5. What are the links between the dominant notions of sexuality and masculinity and 'harmful sexual behaviour' of boys?
6. What promising or best practice interventions exist?
7. What challenges were encountered and how were they resolved?

## Research Methodology

The present study follows an inductive qualitative analysis to inquire the research problem. Qualitative research is generally defined as a "situated activity that locates the observer in the world. It consists of a set of interpretative and material practices that make the world visible [...] and it attempts to make sense of, or interpret phenomena in terms of the meaning people bring to them"(Denzin and Lincoln, 2005, p.3). In this regard the methodology provides opportunities to the participants to share subjective experiences in detail. Thus this

analytical approach can address the limitations of quantitative survey research where in the study participants are restricted and directed by the researcher. Inductive approaches allow findings to emerge from the data that are grounded in the social context itself.

### **Sampling design and sample size**

**Sampling Design:** A combination of sampling designs was followed to identify respondents from different categories. Purposive sampling was adopted to identify boys who experienced sexual interactions in their life, as this population was ‘hidden’ and difficult to access by researchers due to the taboos associated with discussing sexual experiences with others in the context. All boys who experienced sexual interactions were identified through case files of the Mental Health Unit of Butterflies or that of trusted partner of the organization. Simple random sampling was used to identify boys and girls from the general population for FGDs. Both, the boys who experienced sexual interactions, and boys and girls from general population were identified from Delhi. Stakeholders for Key Informant Interviews(KII) and Informant Interviews(II) were purposively identified from within and outside Delhi.

**Sample Size:** A total of 20 boys between the ages of 15 and below 18 years who experienced sexual interactions participated in the extended interviews. In addition to this, 15 boys and 15 girls from the general population participated in 6 focus group discussions. The study also covered a total of 28 stakeholders including parents (nine female and four male caregivers) and professionals such as teachers (three males), social workers (six females), experts in child protection (two females and one male), Child Welfare Committee (CWC) members (two females) and Juvenile Justice Board (JJB) (one female) member for informant and key informant interviews. Thus a total of 78 participants from different categories participated in the study.

**Methods of Data Collection:** Considering complexity and sensitivity of the research problem, multiple methods were used to elicit data

from different categories of participants. Extended Interviews (EIs) or in-depth interviews were conducted to elicit detailed information including meaning and lived experiences of boys in Delhi. Multiple sessions were conducted to complete each and every interview. Though space and time for the sessions were fixed according to the convenience of the boys, privacy was ensured to share their feelings and experiences in their own words. Apart from extended interviews focus group discussions were also used to explore common understandings of children. Homogeneous groups of boys and girls under 18 years with a group size of 5 members were formed from the general population to elicit data on research questions through debate and discussion.

Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) and Informant Interviews (IIs) were conducted with different stakeholders to explore their insights into the topic especially causes and appropriate responses to it. The category of stakeholders encompasses professionals as well as parents and caregivers of boys from the general population. Different participatory techniques such as vignette, body map, spheres of influence and protection shield were used with children in EIs and FGDs to make the experience positive and meaningful for them. The techniques helped the participants to understand the study, and to address the research questions without any inhibitions and difficulties. They also ensured wellbeing of participants before closing the interviews.

### **Ethical considerations**

A research and ethical protocol was developed by the lead consultants for the study. The ethical protocol was informed by an in-country risk assessment. All staff recruited for this research project had reference checks made regarding their suitability for the role, where possible police checks, and were briefed on and asked to sign their commitment to the child protection policy of the organization.

As mentioned above, all boys who experienced sexual interactions were identified through case files of the Mental Health Unit of a trusted partner of Butterflies. The lead researcher ensured that an



individual risk assessment was completed with the boys' caseworker/ social worker to determine whether they felt that he was in a sufficiently stable condition to participate. No boy that was known to be a victim of sexual abuse or an actor in harmful sexual behaviour was invited to take part in the research if this process had not been completed.

Informed consent of research participants was gained through initial sharing of information about the research project. Once participants had expressed an interest in taking part, they attended a consent meeting at least one week prior to the research activity where they were invited to consent or refuse to take part. A discussion to re-confirm consent took place at the beginning of all EIs and FGDs. Children's consent was recorded verbally and parents' consent was recorded on a consent form wherever possible. All adult participants completed a consent form. In focus group discussions and extended interviews the issue of consent was re-visited at the end of the research activity. Participants were given the opportunity to opt-out at any point of interview and say whether they wanted anything they said to be deleted from the documentation.

During data collection, all Research Associates worked with case worker(s) of the Mental Health Unit of Butterflies. This mechanism ensured accessibility and presence of some one that could provide psychosocial support to children if they became distressed in the process. Research Associates were informed about the Child Protection Committee of Butterflies and procedures to be followed in emergencies including contacting the committee members. The Child Protection Committee members were also aware about the protocol to be followed in case of the need for urgent action to help a child identified as at risk through the research, or in case of need for further guidance or concern.

All researchers were fluent in the local language, so there was no need for interpretation during data collection. Consideration was made of the gender of researchers interviewing boys who experienced sexual

interactions. This was to ensure their comfort, gain accurate data and, where possible, accommodate boys' preferences. Reimbursement of any travel expenses and refreshments for research participants, and their parent/care giver if necessary, was provided. Given the sensitive nature of discussions, all research activities took place in venues and spaces that were suited and safe for participants.

Confidentiality of data was provided for through a system of coding notes and recordings, which were turned into coded transcriptions. Pseudonyms were used for all the children who participated in the research activities. Consent Forms and participant contact details will be kept confidentially for one year after publication of the report, to enable consent and accuracy for use of quotes from participants to be revisited if needed.

### **Field Work and Data Collection**

Five researchers were selected to support the field work and documentation. Out of five, three of them were given the responsibility to collect data from the field while others supported in collecting secondary literature and transcribing the interviews. One Child Protection Officer [CPO] from the Mental Health Unit of the Butterflies was assigned to be part of the study to ensure that children are safe and comfortable during the interview process. A training was organized in June 2018 with the research associates, CPO and Child Protection Committee members on the study's objectives, methodology, transcribing data and the ethical protocol. An emphasis was given to participatory techniques adopted by the study and child friendly communication skills in the training. Discussions were facilitated to reflect the researchers' own beliefs on gender, masculinities and sexuality and how to avoid bringing these biases during data collection process including transcribing interviews. With the support of Child Protection Committee members, discussions were organized on child safeguarding policy of the organization and procedures to be followed, if a child is identified at risk and needs support.

Before starting data collection a pilot of the data collection methods was under taken in July 2018 to check the appropriateness of the translation, methods and ethical protocol and to ensure the research team was confident when using the tools.

Taking insights of the pilot study, field work was carried out over a period of four and half months from mid of July to October 2018. Extended interviews with boys in Delhi were conducted in Child Development Centres or Contact point of Butterflies with the presence of the CPO. Focus group discussions with both boys and girls from the general population were conducted in the office of Butterflies to ensure a safe and conducive environment to have discussions. Support from an organization working in the area of sexual health was also sought to identify and conduct interviews with boys who had experienced sexual interactions. A mutual informal agreement was made and interviews with boys from the organisation were conducted in the presence of the counsellor of the organization. This approach helped the research associates to conduct interviews without difficulties.

As part of the effort of mapping interventions in the area of child sexual abuse or harmful sexual behaviour of boys, visits were conducted to two known organizations in the country (Tulir, Chennai and Aarambh, Mumbai). Interviews with the Directors, Programme Heads and Social Workers of the organizations were beneficial in unravelling and consolidating the information related to interventions.

### **Data Analysis Methods and Validation**

An inductive analytical approach was followed in analysing the qualitative data collected through interviews. EIs, FGDs, KIIs and IIs were transcribed into a chunk of text. A process of data reduction, data display, conclusion drawing and verification (Miles and Huberman, 1994) was followed to analyse the data. Three levels of coding allowed the progressive refinement of data:

- I. Coding made the voluminous data into organised data with a manageable focus.

2. Coding further focused the level one codes into categories.
3. Coding involved developing themes/key findings from the categories.

The technical meeting on analysis organized by Family for Every Child in September 2018 in Nepal was beneficial to understand the methods. Practical sessions facilitated by the lead consultant offered clarity in identifying codes from the text, organizing multiple codes into categories and developing key findings of the study.

The findings were further validated through a process of sharing them with participants and peer review. Two meetings with 12 boys 9 (victims and actors), one meeting with 10 boys and girls from general population and two meeting with 10 caregivers were organized either in Butterflies' office or contact points of Butterflies. Discussion with the groups on findings helped to refine the study's key findings. As part of peer review, the study was shared with a lead researcher from one of the member organizations of this project, and social scientists in India, and their suggestions incorporated before finalizing the report.

# Challenges and Reflections

The study faced many challenges during the process. Some of the key challenges and reflections are as follows:

- Butterflies is working with children and families who have migrated from different parts of northern India, and they visit their native places in times of festivals and vacations. This mobility of the participants hindered data collection as many sessions had to be conducted to complete each and every interview. This situation forced the research team often to begin from the background and initial questions. Thus to an extent, it affected the flow of data collection and limited the investigator to probe sufficiently to elicit detailed information.
- Since discussion on sexuality and related aspects are taboo topics in the context, not only children but adults also restricted themselves while responding to the questions. Though participatory techniques were found to be helpful in encouraging the participants to share their perspectives and experiences, there were instances when they stopped themselves at a certain point and kept silent.
- By dint of hidden nature of the population and sampling techniques followed, boys from the upper class/strata were hardly covered in the study. Consequently this restricted the study from providing in-depth descriptions about their perspectives and experiences.

- Child participants who were involved in work and continuing education were not found to be very supportive in following all of the participatory techniques shared. They pointed out the time constraints with applying these tools.
- Mapping interventions of organizations in the country was a great challenge while considering the size of the country and time frame for the study. Therefore based on the suggestions of subject experts and literature review, a couple of organizations were selected to visit and explore their strategies in detail. Programmes and efforts of a few organizations working in different parts of the country were critically reviewed through materials accessed from their websites including their published reports.

# Key Findings

Different patterns and themes emanated from the sharing of boys, parents and other stakeholders such as teachers, professionals and experts working on children and sexual abuse. Following are the key findings of the qualitative analysis.

## **I. Victims, Actors and Perpetrators**

Experiences shared by boys unsettled a few dominant notions on childhood sexual experiences, victims, actors and perpetrators. The majority of boys interviewed were sexually abused between the age of 14 and 16 while a minority of victims were found to be around 10 years. The findings went along with the observations of analyses based on experiences of survivors, that the majority of men consulted experienced sexual abuse during adolescence (Finkelhor, Shattuck, Turner and Hamby, 2014; Hillman, O' Mara, Tylor-Robinson and Harris, 1990). Almost all the perpetrators were known to the boys and a minority-in three cases- were strangers. The known persons include close relatives, neighbours, older friends and adult acquaintances. The finding rejected the myth that 'children are abused by strangers' and corroborated with the available findings (Tulir, 2006; GOI, 2007; KP, 2009; Mitayani, 2011). Challenging the stereo type and existing materials in India, along with men, women and older boys or peers were explored as perpetrators. In three cases each, women and older friends or peers were found as perpetrators.

It was observed that boys from middle class families were also sexually abused, albeit their representation was not very significant within the sample. Three boys from middle class family backgrounds shared

about their abusive experiences. Against the popular notions about ‘prevalence of sexual abuse among children from lower class’, this finding highlighted the fact that sexual abuse happens across different class backgrounds. Most of the boys were sexually abused within public spaces, such as the community or street situations and school while a minority suffered sexual abuse within family setting. Boys living in street situations and boys who followed non-conforming gender practices<sup>6</sup> were found to be more vulnerable to sexual abuse and subsequently other forms of discrimination.

Besides sexual abuse, the majority of the boys articulated their experience of exploring sexuality with boy or girl friends during adolescence. It was also found that a section of boys were involved in harmful behaviours<sup>7</sup>. Five teenagers or adolescent boys were identified as persons with harmful sexual behaviour, though they never considered themselves as such. Their accounts indicated violence within their intimate relationships; harmful behaviour of the boys directed towards either their (younger) boyfriends or girlfriends. The problematic sexual behaviour that was noted was interpersonal in nature.

It is vital to note that though majority (nine out of fifteen boys) had an abusive sexual experience in the past, they were able to engage in consensual sex in later stages in their life. In a similar vein, most of the boys with harmful sexual behaviour had either experiences of sexual abuse and involving in consensual sex. This point is further probed and discussed under the following theme on childhood sexual experiences.

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6 Boys from this category followed practices including appearance, language, behaviour which does not match with the dominant masculine practices or expectations in the social context. Most of them were labelled as feminine and followed dominant feminine practices.

7 It is vital to note that none of the boys identified the behaviour as harmful or problematic. Analysis of each case within the context, following the definition provided, helped the research team to define these practices as harmful or problematic. This point is further probed and discussed under the theme of sexual experiences and It was later shared with the participants during the discussions to validate the findings.



## **2. To be a courageous and independent household provider: Boys as masculine subjects**

The lived experiences of boys in families and communities revealed notions of masculinities in the social context. All the participants unanimously mentioned about their freedom to roam around often without any questions from their parents.

“A boy has many benefits. He can go out freely. But girls can not. Boys are not afraid of anyone. But girls are afraid of getting sexually abused” (Vijay<sup>8</sup>, boy victim of sexual abuse, 15 years).

“We boys can go wherever we want. But if a girl goes out, even if she’s going to work, people eve tease her” (Sunil, boy victim of sexual abuse, 17 years).

“Boys can roam around anywhere freely, but girls can not. For girls it is better not to roam around outside as lot of bad people are outside” (Navdeep, boy victim of sexual abuse, 17 years).

These responses clearly pointed out perceived ideas of boys on the inherent vulnerability of girls and consequent protection issues including sexual violence outside households or families. It was also implied that boys were intrinsically capable of dealing with issues and there fore allowed and encouraged to move around freely, thus to be courageous and independent men who could take care of them selves. This reflected the myth enmeshed in participants that ‘boys cannot be sexually abused’.

The notion that boys are ‘masculine’, ‘courageous’ and ‘independent’ beings who can take care of themselves was further extended by linking practices with in households. By bringing out sexual division of labour within households a boy shared:

“Boys get freedom. They can stay wherever they want even till late night. Don’t have to do much work at home” (Sohan, boy actor in consensual sex, 17 years).

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<sup>8</sup>Pseudonyms are used to protect identity.

This was further elaborated: “Girls are asked to do household work, boys are generally not told to do house work but they can do” (Vijay, boy victim of sexual abuse, 15 years).

These quotes point out masculine and feminine practices associated with males and females in households.

Boys further elaborated this in detail:

“To buy things for the home, mostly boys go. Girls help in cooking and washing clothes, cleaning the house. Boys have to grow big and take care of their parents, younger siblings. But mostly girls only teach their younger siblings. If anything gets damaged in house, the boy has to repair it. Girls will get married and go away, hence since childhood girls are differentiated in families. Parents believe that their son will only earn and take care of the family” (Vijay, boy victim of sexual abuse, 15 years).

Agreeing with the boys, the girls from the general population who participated in the focus group discussions pointed out the role of women as mothers and house wives. Besides pointing out the perceived vulnerability of girls, the latter response of boys implied that good girls/women should not be in the public space (Boudet, Petesch, Turk and Thumala, 2013). To quote “We boys can go wherever we want. But if a girl goes out, even if she’s going to work, people tease<sup>9</sup> her. Neighbours say that why she is going for job and she must stay at home only” (Sunil, boy victim of sexual abuse, 17 years).

In short, it can be ascertained from the discussions that boys were allowed, encouraged and taught to be independent household providers. It was premised on the belief that boys are intrinsically capable of managing themselves in difficult situations, and they can take care of parents and family members as household providers in

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<sup>9</sup>Eve teasing is a euphemism used in South Asia for public sexual harassment or sexual assault of girls and women by men.

future. Being in public spaces was considered as normal and masculine. Boys notions of masculinities were defined in tandem with notions of femininities; being a caring mother and homemaker (Srivastava 2012). A perceived vulnerability of girls, and notions about women and girls presence in public spaces as unsafe and unacceptable. These notions were found influential in defining what is feminine and thus confining women to household.

### **3. Childhood/adolescence sexual experiences: Changing subjectivities**

As indicated earlier, sharing of the boys unravelled their diverse sexual experiences, viz, sexual abuse, consensual sexual exploration and harmful sexual behaviours in the life course. In this regard, the findings unfolded intricacies within childhood sexual experiences of boys and highlighted the need of listening to the voices of children rather than dissecting their lived experiences within the restricted framework of ‘abuse and harmful behaviour.’

Almost all the boys who were sexually abused articulated their experience in a phrase, “Mere Saath Galat Kiya” [Did wrong with me] and thus explicitly expressed their disagreement with the practice in a language used in the social context. The abusers used varying strategies ranging from explicit use of force and threat to persuasion sometimes by giving gifts and money for sexually abusing the boys. Following extract from an interview elaborates this.

“...That time I had just run away from home and come to old Delhi. I didn’t even know about all these things. I wanted to go to toilet. I asked somebody and they gave me directions to the toilet. After using the toilet, I was washing my hands, when one man who was also washing his hands with me, caught my hand and threatened me with his knife. He dragged me inside the toilet and showing his knife ordered me to do many things (yeh bhi kar, who bhi kar)...He took off my clothes and asked me to hold his penis. Then he did it to me from behind. He also verbally abused me using filthy language and threatened me that if I told anyone he would kill me. Then I ran away

from there...” (Navdeep, boy victim of sexual abuse, 17 years).

Similarly another participant expressed his experience from a group of perpetrators:

“I tried to refuse first and ran away. But then they brought me back with the promise that they won’t do to me again. When I went back, all of them surrounded me. Then they forced me to do all these things....” (Arnav, boy victim of sexual abuse, 17 years).

In most of the instances the boys were forced in the beginning and later they became compliant. Gifts, food and even drugs were given to boys in specific cases. A boy mentioned: “He gave me food and solution<sup>10</sup> and I agreed”. However persuasion was more evident in the cases wherein women and older friends and peers were perpetrators.

Instead of using force, women perpetrators in all three cases persuaded boys to be involved in sexual relationships with them. Sharing of a boy barely 17 years with his female neighbour underlines this.

“One day while watching TV she began touching my body, touched my penis also. She made me touch her body also. I tried to stop her but she didn’t stop. I came out from there then..... I was very angry with what happened. Next day she again called me. But I didn’t feel like going, but gradually, when I realised that it is safe to go there, I started going...I used to ‘do with her’ sometimes 3 times a day and she gave me Rs.10-20 to eat snacks.” (Shariff, boy victim of sexual abuse, 16 years).

The other two women perpetrators also followed similar approaches to involve sexual relationships with them, older friends or peers also used the same pattern to lure boys in all the three cases in the study. One boy described this in an explicit language.

“He used to touch my buttocks, make me touch his penis.... He used

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<sup>10</sup>A form of substance in a tube, originally used as a glue.

to touch my chest. Initially I didn't like it, but gradually I also liked it" (Asif, boy victim of sexual abuse, 18 years).

Another participant mentioned: "...she told me that she loved me and would give her life for me" (Aseem, boy victim of sexual abuse, 17 years). And this approach made the boy to submit to the abusers. The findings underscored indications in the studies in different contexts in the country (Tulir, 2006; GOI, 2007; KP, 2009).

The majority of participants were able to explore sexuality either with their older boyfriends or girlfriends during adolescence. The majority of boys from this category had been sexually abused in the past. The episodes were observed to be consensual. In general boys used "did with me/her" to indicate consensual sexual interactions. For instance, one boy shared his experience with his boyfriend:

"He came to my shop and took me... He is younger to me but we are of the same height. Then I did to him and he also did to me" (Naseef, boy actor in consensual sex, 16 years).

Another participant shared: "My first sexual experience was in my school when I was in class 10. I was around 15-16 years old. It was consensual and no one forced us" Varun, boy actor in consensual sex, 17 years.

Consensual explorations were also found with girlfriends as stated by one boy: "I did it with my girlfriend"(Shariff, boy actor in consensual sex, 16 years). This finding highlighted the resilience of a couple of boys, as it helped them to overcome their previously frightening, painful and confusing abusive experience. It also departed from dominant literature on child sexual abuse and harmful sexual behaviour and acknowledged child sexuality as normal (Angelides, 2004; Hunter, 2006). Moreover, these articulations of boys indicated the meaning of sexuality in terms of pleasure in the background of romantic relationships (Seidman et al., 2011).

It was also found that a section of boys displayed harmful sexual behaviour. Highlighting the diverse experiences, most of the boys

from this category had either experiences of exploring sexuality or sexual abuse or both<sup>11</sup>. Most of the boys involved in harmful sexual behaviour with their boy or girlfriends used physical force, persuaded them emotionally in the name of love, and gave gifts and money for sexual interactions. The following case illustrates this point.

“I myself had sex with 5 girls. It was forceful only with 1 girl recently... We both loved each other for around 2 months, I used to give her gifts also. But then she started roaming around with another boy in front of me, I got upset and asked her to kiss me but she refused. Then I forcibly kissed her and then we had sex... She cried after that...” (Amit, boy actor in harmful sexual behaviour, 17 years).

In another case the boy offered ‘solution’ (substance) to his younger boyfriend:

“I also do it with one friend. I give him solution and he agrees to have sex with me” (Vijay, boy actor in harmful sexual behaviour, 15 years).

This finding invites attention to ongoing debates on forms of violence within (intimate) relationships in the context of sexual interactions among adolescents in the country. Responses of the boys explored interpersonal harmful behaviour as well.

To sum up, the findings unfolded intricacies of childhood sexual experiences of boys and highlighted the need of listening to the voices of children.

#### **4. Fear, anger, rage, positivity and ambiguities around sexuality**

Reflecting diverse childhood sexual experiences, boys described different effects and feelings as a result of the episode(s). Almost all the boys who were sexually abused described their painful experiences<sup>11</sup> and resultant fear, anger and rage due to the instances.

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<sup>11</sup>It would be misleading to read these diverse incidents of boys through a linear lens, i.e. these boys learned harmful behaviour through sexual abuse and exploration of sexuality. Rather experiences of boys from this category happened in a non-linear pattern.

“(I) was told that I will be killed. I got scared...even I cried, it was really painful<sup>12</sup>...” (Ajmal, boy victim of sexual abuse, 17 years).

Another participant who was sexually abused by a woman said: “I was afraid as they (woman & her siblings) would harm me” (Sunil, boy victim of sexual abuse, 17 years). A couple of boys were under this fear for long and that made them to be scared of people who had similar appearance of the abuser. A sharing can elaborate this... “After that I got very scared of big people and to roam around alone and used to always roam with friends” (Amit, boy victim of sexual abuse, 17 years).

It was observed that a couple of boys expressed their feeling of anger and rage just after the incident of abuse, while for a few of them the feeling developed later. “I was very angry with what happened” (Shariff, boy victim of sexual abuse, 16 years), one participant responded. There were instances in which fear gradually turned into anger and rage.

Following excerpt underlined these in an explicit manner: “I see bad dreams of him with ten hands holding ten knives and trying to attack me from close. I still see him and feel like throwing acid on his face” (Darpan, boy victim of sexual abuse, 15 years).

Anger and rage were also linked to notions of being a male.

“I was very angry and was going to hit him with a stone. I was very angry and felt that I was not a man” (Amit, boy victim of sexual abuse, 17 years).

This response obliquely sheds light to the expressions of violence embedded in masculinity. In short the sharing revealed effects such as fear, anger and rage among boys and notions of masculinity ingrained in the feeling of anger and rage.

Boys who explored sexuality with their boy or girlfriends responded

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<sup>12</sup>Though the physical interactions were shared as painful, no one in the study mentioned that it resulted in wounds and bruises.

differently to express their feelings. Along with mentioning the experience as positive, connected to desire, selfhood and being a man, a section of boys revealed ambiguities about sexuality and roles and responsibilities in sexual interactions.

“I used to have dreams of having sex before this incident. But after that experience, I stopped having such dreams. I liked it a lot. She also liked it a lot” (Jigeesh, boy actor in consensual sex, 16 years), shared by an adolescent.

Pointing out to desire and positivity, another boy added:

“When we first did it, I felt odd too as we both were boys but at the same time I thought to do it, to continue it... And I felt nice too. That experience changed me a lot. He came into my life and changed me a lot (Varun, boy actor in consensual sex, 17 years).

The linkage between having sex and masculinity was also indicated: A teenager shared: “I like having sex. I feel like a man” (Amit, boy actor in consensual sex, 17 years).

Along side the instrumental point of view, a section of boys highlighted their ambiguities as well.

“I didn’t know much about it but I did it. It felt ok but not very good” (Salim, actor in consensual sex, 16 years).

A few of them felt that they did something wrong, “I know it’s not a good thing and will not do it for some time now” (Kameel, boy actor in consensual sex, 17 years). While others worried about response of people.

“I do talk jokingly with my friends about this but I don’t tell them my house address. They too tease me because of my past, call me *laundiyaabaz* (habit for girls) (Kameel, boy actor in consensual sex, 17 years).

Lack of awareness of the majority participants on sexuality, its social meaning and health implications including sexually transmitted



infections, HIV/AIDS was also noticed as one of the factors for contributing to these ambiguities. Their understanding can be summarized as “I know about sexuality as I have already had sex” (Amit, boy actor in consensual sex, 17 years).

Worries about the response of people not only limited to a particular case. It was found that they were also scared of the responses of their care givers such as parents and teachers as well.

“I didn’t tell anyone. My family will beat me up. I was very scared of them” (Aseem, boy victim of sexual abuse, 17 years).

“(I) was scared also of teachers and other children... I tried once hard to tell my teacher... I was also worried of how the teacher will react as it was a government school. I didn’t feel like telling as it would have been an insult to the family also “(Asif, boy victim of sexual abuse, 18 years).

It is obvious from the sharing that sexuality including sexual abuse was not known or acknowledged and a point of discussion or conversation in the social context. This situation therefore pushed the participants into varying difficult situations and their struggles were seldom noticed and addressed.

A few children were found absent in schools, dropped out, lost interest in studies and ran away from family there by ending on the streets without adult supervision due to this situation and inappropriate actions of parents where in they came to know about the episodes. After incident of abuse one boy said: “I used to not go to school at that time” (Amit, boy victim of sexual abuse, 17 years). Another boy ran away from a hostel as he thought “they would also do the same thing to me as that man did in the toilet. Then I ran away and came back here (on the street). I never went back to that area. Neither do I go to any public toilet” (Navdeep, boy victim , 17 years).

In addition to these, boys from this section also shared that they either lost focus in studies or got poor results in exams.

Following explanation underscored this:

“I don’t remember if I got hurt. I then started losing concentration on my studies. In fact at that time I did not have interest in doing anything” (Anupam, boy victim of sexual abuse, 17 years).

Inappropriate responses of parents also worsened the life of boys. In a case where the consensual relationship became known:

“Then my parents beat me a lot. My father threatened me that he’ll throw me out of the house. Fearing their beating I took Rs.2,000 from the house and ran away to Guwahati. I had to leave school due to that... (Sohan, boy actor in consensual sex, 17 years).

Adding to the inappropriate response of parents, a boy who followed nonconforming gender practices shared: When I was beaten for this behaviour of mine, I used to feel like committing suicide (Asif, boy victim of sexual abuse, 18 years). In another case wherein the abusers were caught and presented in front of Pradhan (local community leader), the parent decided not to go to police “for the sake of protecting my (the boy’s) identity and family respect” (Arnav, boy victim of sexual abuse, 17 years).

Within these all difficult situations, it was observed that the boys were able to negotiate their lives and follow their dreams with hope. Some of them kept blades with them to protect themselves; “He wanted to do to me. But when I took out my knife, he ran away...” (Kameel, boy actor in consensual sex, 17 years).

A few boys avoided the abusers and found safe spaces. “I used to avoid talking with her and go and sleep with her boyfriend’s sister’s home. I used to sleep in the room locking the door securely” (Sunil, boy victim of sexual abuse, 17 years).

Another boy positively responded: “Looking back to the episode now, I think I have forgiven. I intentionally completely erased the memory. That didn’t make any impact on me. I want to become a big person” (Ajmal, boy victim of sexual abuse, 17 years).

Responses of boys on the effects and feelings of childhood sexual experiences unfolded grey areas which are yet not charted. Reflecting child sexual abuse, almost all the boys shared their fear, anger and rage after the incident. This finding indeed explored the fact that they were in trauma. Although not all of them were able to articulate its impact in their everyday life and relationships, sharing of a few boys explicitly stated an impact on education and life. The boys who explored their sexuality through consensual relationships with boys or girlfriends highlighted positive experience. Ambiguities around sexuality were also stated by the boys as some of them could not make out what happened with them while others failed to understand the way they transgressed the boundaries of consent and (mis)used their power in different ways.

### **5. Responsible and caring (heterosexual) household provider**

Perspectives of boys on what does it mean to be a man or qualities associated with a male revealed multiple often contradictory and ideal masculine attributes. Two major themes emerged from the responses of boys, interestingly both went along with the experiences of boys discussed in the above section. This highlighted the dominant notions of masculinities in the social context as social practice and ideology. The first theme revolved around social attributes while the second theme was based on physical, emotional social attributes broadly linked to sexuality.

*Asli Mard* (Real Man) was the local term widely followed in the social context to denote a masculine man. Boys addressed this question *Asli Mard* (Real Man) in association with the social attributes of man with in family and community. One boy perceived:

“He should take care of his family, keep them well (*sahi se rakhe*). He must obey his family members till he is married. He must work and earn and take care of his parents when they are old. He should

help in the home, buy things and cut vegetables. He must take care of his younger siblings, sisters. He must respect his teachers, should study well and become a responsible man” (Anupam, boy victim of sexual abuse, 17 years).

It is obvious from the sharing that boys perceived responsible household provider who could take care of family as the dominant expression of masculinity or *Asli Mard*. It is also vital to note that this household provider is essentially perceived as heterosexual, therefore it would be more appropriate to term it as responsible (heterosexual) household provider as the dominant expression.

Responses of boys on the role of males in communities further extended the idea of responsible (heterosexual) household provider. It was said by a boy that “He must not allow the teasing of girls in his community, must keep his community clean” (Vijay, boy victim of sexual abuse, 15 years). Another one added to it:

“He must ensure that his colony is clean. If anyone asks him for help, to bring something from the market, he must do it”(Fariz, boy actor in harmful sexual behaviour, 17 years).

The responses revealed the notion that real men must not only take care of themselves and their families but they were supposed to extend it to the community as well.

Parents and community members also defined *asli mard* in a similar fashion. According to one parent: “Boys must earn, help his parents, live in harmony and not fight with people” (Manoj, male caregiver). Another adult participant corroborated it:

“A boy must take care of his parents when they grow old. Like I have taken care of my parents in their old age, he must also take care of us” (Gayatri, female caregiver).

Discussion on the perspectives of boys as well as parents’ unravelled

one of the dominant notions of masculinity, locally understood as *asli mard*, as responsible and caring (heterosexual) household provider in the context. Though the social attribute did not overtly mention it, heterosexuality was perceived as the base for their family.

## 6. A Strong and courageous (heterosexual) virile man

The second theme that emanated from the boys on *asli mard* was a combination of physical, emotional and social attributes of males widely accepted in the society. As against the responsible, caring (heterosexual) household provider discussed above, sexuality and its expressions were more explicitly shared and discussed by the boys when they proposed the second articulation of masculinities.

Pointing out to the physical attributes, one boy said: “An *asli mard* is one who is courageous and strong...and fearless even in late night. A person who is *darpok* (coward) is not an *aslimard*” (Ajmal, boy victim of sexual abuse, 17 years).

Another boy added: “He should be mature and strong” (Kameel, boy actor in consensual sex, 17 years). A boy corroborated: “An *asli mard* is one who has a strong body” (Sohan, boy actor in consensual sex, 17 years). These physical attributes were later tied with social meanings. According to a boy: “A strong man who fights and also saves others is an *asli mard* (Jigeesh, boy actor in consensual sex, 16 years). “...An *asli mard* is one who does boxing.... does lot of fighting and becomes a champion often” (Navdeep, boy victim of sexual abuse, 17 years). Another added: “An *asli mard* is one who controls his tears and comforts everyone...A man who takes care and protects the dignity of girls is a hero” (Anupam, boy victim of sexual abuse, 17 years).

Through this linkage, masculine articulation acquired a social meaning and violence was found as an indispensable expression of the strong and courageous man.

It was found that most of the boys perceived being virile as intrinsically linked together with the masculine articulation. Sharing

of boys revealed this:

“(He) should be strong enough to have sex.... Have a long penis” (Ajmal, boy victim of sexual abuse, 17 years).

“A good male must know sex” (Salim, actor in consensual sex, 16 years)

“An *asli mard* is one who can perform the sexual act” (Jigeesh, boy actor in consensual sex, 16 years).

These excerpts from interviews evidently underlined the way knowledge about sex, notions about virility were conflated in masculinity.

Boys defined this masculine articulation, ‘*asli mard*’ opposite to the local social register, ‘*namard*’ (impotent). Addressing virility, boys shared that: “A man who can’t have sex with his wife is a *namard* (Anupam, boy victim of sexual abuse, 17 years). “A *namard* is one who can’t do anything (Jigeesh, boy actor in consensual sex, 16 years).

“If he cannot do sex he is a *namard*. Only a man can do sex... A man who marries and can’t have sex with wife is not a man (*a namard*)” (Shariff, boy victim of sexual abuse, 16 years).

These responses summarized that strength, courage, sexual knowledge and virility became an indispensable part of the masculinity.

It is vital to add here that boys specified sexual orientation of this masculinity. Following responses elaborated this point. “(he should) not have any affair/relation with any other man” (Kameel, boy actor in consensual sex, 17 years).

“A man who has sex with a man is a *ganda aadmi* (dirty/wrong man), a *bekaar aadmi* (useless man). We call him *chakka*<sup>13</sup>” (Navdeep, boy victim of sexual abuse, 17 years).

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<sup>13</sup>A derogatory term used to mention same-sex persons and transgenders in North India.

Sharing of boys pointed out heterosexuality as masculine as opposed to same-sex sexual practices.

This unitary model was not agreed by all. A couple of boys disagreed to the term, *namard* and its given meaning. Boys following non-conforming gender practices argued that

“The *namard* name should not be there. A person is called a *namard* if he does not have such feelings to have sex. However, girls if they do not have feelings to have sex, they are not given any name. A boy may have different qualities but he can still be called *namard*. Everyone has different qualities” (Varun, boy actor in consensual sex, 17 years).

This response indeed highlighted the scope of transformation in the dominant notions through counter narratives.

## **7. Heterosexuality within marriage and legal definitions**

Almost all the participants perceived heterosexuality within marriage and legal definitions as socially conforming sexual behaviour for both male and female. It is vital to note that they presented their views addressing adulthood rather than adolescence or childhood. Thus the boys eschewed childhood sexuality in the discussions. Though a couple of them presented counter views and transgressed boundaries of the dominant sexual behaviour in an implicit way, they accepted the dominant articulations in general. Their responses on accepted age for having girl/boyfriends, spending time together and having sex clearly articulated their views on sexuality.

Sharing of a participant on accepted age of having a girl/boyfriend. “The boy must be at least 21 years and the girls at least 20 or 19” (Ajmal, boy victim of sexual abuse, 17 years). Another boy affirmed this, albeit mentioning a different reality: “Nowadays it doesn’t matter; people have girl friends at the age of 15, 10 & 20. Ideally boys must have a girlfriend only at the age of 20 and girls at the age of 18”. (Salim, actor in consensual sex, 16 years). It is clear from the answers that boys perceived adulthood as the legitimate developmental stage

for having girl or boyfriends.

Responses of boys on spending time alone with a boy or girlfriend, going to public spaces and having sex further expanded the perspective in which love, marriage and having sex were inextricable. Sharing of boys shed light on this. One participant replied: “We must do it (spending time alone) only after marriage which our parents fix for us. We must not cause shame to our parents. We are taught that after the age of 18 years we can do” (Sunil, boy victim of sexual abuse, 17 years). Another boy added to it: “They should go in public only after marriage” (Aseem, boy victim of sexual abuse, 17 years).

The viewpoints intersected with notions of appropriate age for having sex. Representing others, one boy argued: “We must do only after marriage. But the boy and girl should be more than 18 years old” (Sunil, boy victim of sexual abuse, 17 years). Another response put the idea explicitly within the legal definitions. “Sex should not happen before the age of 20 and sex should happen only in marriage” (Salim, actor in consensual sex, 16 years). Bringing attention to adulthood, the legitimate developmental stage to have sex, one boy said: “Boys and girls should be above 20-21 years. Before that they are immature and only after 21 their body is fully developed. Girls should be 18 years at least” (Jigeesh, boy actor in consensual sex, 16 years).

It is obvious from the sharing that boys perceive heterosexuality within marriage and legal definitions as socially conforming sexual behaviour. Majority of the boys expressed their disagreement on same-sex (intimate) relationships by presenting multiple justifications and thus confirmed heterosexuality as normative practice.

Addressing a question on same-sex relations, one boy said: “it is wrong if two boys want to have sex” (Ajmal, boy victim of sexual abuse, 17 years). Another boy validated this: “...man and woman having sex is ok as something can come out of it...Boys should marry girls only. It is the law/rule of Nature...Boys should not have sex with boys, as it is wrong, it harms the sexual organs and is unnatural too, and it causes diseases also” (Kameel, boy actor in consensual sex, 17 years).



Another boy stated, health implications as a matter of concern: "... they will become weak and they will grow old faster" (Salim, actor in consensual sex, 16 years). Indicating societal non-acceptance, a boy responded: "It is not right, society will not accept it" (Vijay, boy victim of sexual abuse, 15 years).

Even though a few boys offered a counter narrative, they too believed heterosexuality as socially conforming practice in the context. "Two boys can get married but it can happen only in court<sup>14</sup> not in our community" (Anupam, boy victim of sexual abuse, 17 years), a boy shared. Another one added to it: "Two boys if they like each other, should get married. I have many gay (older) friends who have got married and are living happily together" (Varun, boy actor in consensual sex, 17 years).

But it is interesting to note that one of the boys reminded that "...but marriage between gays might break within 3-4 months. According to me sex and marriage between 2 boys is not correct. Marriage should only take place between a boy and girl, which is the law of nature also" (Anupam, boy victim of sexual abuse, 17 years).

In contrast to the lived experiences, boys perceived heterosexuality within marriage and legal definitions as socially conforming sexual behaviour. It was also explored that boys dismissed child/adolescent sexuality and located love and desire or sex within adulthood and thereby went along with the dominant construction of sexuality in the social context. Love, marriage and having sex were found inextricable in their perspective. In this regard the boys associated sexuality with procreation (Seidman et al., 2011). Although propositions of resistance in perspectives were noticed, it was found limited in its scope.

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<sup>14</sup>The Supreme Court of India decriminalized section 377 of Indian Penal Code referred to 'unnatural sexual offences' on 6th September 2018. This section was used against same-sex persons.

## **8. Violence in constituting (sexual relationship) behaviour: An accepted expression**

Although boys mentioned about their abusive episodes as ‘wrong’, a section of actors who either explored sexuality with their boy/girlfriends or displayed harmful or problematic behaviour elaborated instances where in different forms of violence were used. It is critical to note that the boys never considered it as an expression of violence. Apart from the cases discussed above under harmful sexual behaviour, a couple of cases overtly indicated varying forms of violence experienced and used by the boys.

In one of the cases, the boy who followed non-conforming gender practices shared: “Yes, sometimes people forced me to have sex with them, like when we were travelling in a gay group then some of them asked me to do it. I have done anal sex too with them.... I feel better having sex with my boyfriend. I have only forced him to have sex with me as I like it”. (Varun, boy actor in consensual sex, 17 years).

Another participant described a different angle: “I used to keep asking her, but she used to refuse. One day I got very angry and told her that if she doesn’t agree I will stop all contact with her and break the sim card”. (Jigeesh, boy actor in harmful sexual behaviour, 16 years).

Perspectives of the boys on sexual interactions between intimate partners further justified this. One participant shared: “She (wife) should be ready to have sex and not refuse if her husband asks. If she has any problem, she should share it with her husband...Sometimes wives refuse to have sex if the husband comes home drunk. The husband is working hard outside and facing lot of tension. He wants to come home and get 2 minutes peace. If he does not get this peace at home, this will cause problem as he’ll start drinking and attack his wife and children, have extra marital affairs” (Shariff, boy victim of sexual abuse, 16 years).

Addressing the same question, another boy responded: “...if I have sex with an unmarried woman its ok as she doesn’t know that I’m

married. If after marriage my wife has sex with any other boy, I'll hang her in a ceiling fan and break her legs" (Vijay, boy victim of sexual abuse, 15 years). It is apparent how steeped patriarchal values are embedded and moulded in the beliefs and behaviour of both boys and girls. It is obvious from the cases that violence is considered as normative intimate relationship behaviour as argued by Rousseau-Jemwa, Hendricks and Rehse in South African context (2016).

Acceptance of violence was not only limited in the context of intimate sexual relationships. Viewpoints of boys further explored multiple situations of anger in which expressions of varying forms of violence were normalized.

The following sharing of a boy after the incident of sexual abuse elaborates this, "After that man tried to abuse me, I was very angry and was going to hit him with a stone. I was very angry and felt that I was not a man" (Amit, boy victim of sexual abuse, 17 years). In a similar voice, another boy said: "If I see him (abuser) the next time, I will beat him" (Vijay, boy victim of sexual abuse, 15 years).

In this regard, these responses brought out the way forms of violence deeply ingrained in the behaviour of the boys as a normative including as a means to resolve conflicts (Rousseau-Jemwa, Hendricks and Rehse 2016). One of the cases cited by a Juvenile Justice Board (JJB) member is worth adding here. "...case came to JJB where a child of 5- 6 years was brutally abused by 2 children (in conflict with law) of 16-18 years. There was some kind of family dispute between both families and they caught hold of him and brutally abused the boy... they had put some hard object into the anus of that small boy... My observation in the last three months is that there is lot of aggression in these children which leads to these kinds of incidents".

It also apparently explored the linkage between men/boys and violence and underscored the argument of scholars that violence is inextricably embedded in dominant notions of masculinities in the social context (John and Nair, 2000; Sharma and Das, 2016).

## 9. Interaction between Family, Media and Peers

Interviews with boys and parents overtly revealed the different layers which influenced in (re)producing masculinities and sexuality in the social context. Interaction between family, media and peers was found as the most significant factors in defining dominant notions of masculinities and sexuality.

As seen in the section of experiences of boys in families and communities that the boys were directed to be courageous and independent household providers based on heterosexuality. The immediate family environment was found the most influencing factor in shaping the notion. The following view points of parents elaborated this. “There is a difference in how boys and girls are treated. Boys are loved more. This is because, they know that boys will grow up and earn for the family and take care of the parents” (Haneef, male caregiver). Another parent added: “It is better to be a boy. He can take care of himself... With boys, he can grow up and earn and take care of us” (Satish, male caregiver).

It was further admitted by parents that this dominant notion creates pressure on boys. “As he grows bigger, the parents start telling and pressurizing him to work and earn for the family. As long as he is small, he is treated as a child. But when he grows big, he has to work and earn for the family. Otherwise his parents will say he is a ‘*nikamma*’(useless). People also say that if my son does not work and earn, he is a ‘*nalayak*’(useless) (Satish, male caregiver). These sharing’s agreed to this view without question.

Boys also mentioned that these expectations created pressures in their life. A boy described: “Father never suggests to study, he always asks to work, earn money and give to him, stay at home, get married, and be with your wife...he thinks that there shouldn’t be any difficulties in his old age. If I stay at home, as a son, I should take care of him... (Ajmal, boy victim of sexual abuse, 17 years).

Another one echoed the same: “He is under pressure to work and earn

money for his family. Keep his parents happy. I am under pressure to give my sister a fridge and TV for her marriage. We also have to help our friends” (Asif, boy victim of sexual abuse, 18 years).

It is clear that parents in other words family played an important role in shaping ideas about being a man. Boys also ingrained this and most of them perceived their father as role models. “My father is my role model. I have learnt himmat(courage) and getting angry from him, helping others” (Vijay, boy victim of sexual abuse, 15 years).

Addressing the view on courageous man, one boy mentioned his role model: “When we see a fight and a strong man comes and wins the fight, he is a role model. My role model is Roman, a fighter in World Wrestling Entertainment (WWE) as he fights really well (Salim, actor in consensual sex, 16 years). Thus besides parents, boys also mentioned media as an influencing factor in shaping their experiences and perspectives.

In contrast to the articulation of masculinity, courageous heterosexual household provider learnt through mutual interaction with family, all the boys developed their understanding on sex and sexuality through their own childhood sexual experiences and interaction with media and peers. It is vital to add here that parents and family were never found as sources of information for boys on sexuality.

The following sharing of a boy summarized the views. “I came to know of sex through some of my friends. I also watched movies in TV and the mobile and came to know what sex is” (Aseem, boy victim of sexual abuse, 17 years). The overarching influence of media was highlighted by boys in different mediums. Mobile phones, computers, TV and books were mentioned as the major sources through which they understood about sexuality.

Almost all the boys who participated in the study accessed pornographic materials through mobiles and boys who attended focus group discussions mentioned that they shared such contents with their friends through social media like WhatsApp and Facebook. This

finding went along with India Today survey in which 46 percent of respondents including children watched pornography online (Datta 2015).

Teachers who participated in the study explained a number of instances in which they caught boys red-handed using mobile phones and accessing adult content in the classrooms. Furthermore, boys in focus group discussions also described crime TV series such as *Savdhaan India!-India Fights Back*<sup>15</sup> (*Attention India!-India Fights Back*) and *Crime Patrol* as other sources of information on sexuality and sexual violence. Hence as Jones (2014) argued, media became more influential than peers, parents and other factors in shaping ideas about sex and sexuality.

Deep-seated silence on sex and sexuality and sexual violence (against boys in particular) in families, schools and in the social context is apparent from the responses of boys. As said by a parent: “society doesn’t think that it (sexual abuse) can be possible with the boys. If any incident happens with the girl it becomes burning news for the society. People spread rumours about the girl child but in the cases related to boys, family keeps quiet because their child might become a laughing stock for the society” (Tulsi, female caregiver). Another parent added: “Even friends don’t hear his voice. Friends make fun of him that you are a boy and these things happened with you. Nobody believes him” (Ali, male caregiver).

The sharing pointed out the way sexual violence was understood in the society within the context of heterosexuality in which girls/women were perceived as vulnerable and victims of sexual abuse while boys were never considered as targets of sexual violence as they are considered as intrinsically courageous and masculine.

The role of normative heterosexuality and masculinity was further elaborated: “Roaming around with a boy is not considered wrong by

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<sup>15</sup>This Hindi language crime show deals with real-life crime stories of rape, domestic violence and sexual assault. This show was criticized for the sensational portrayal of crimes.

the community. This is also a reason for choosing boys over girls. Sexual interaction with boys is also safe as there will not be a threat of pregnancy.... If a boy says he is sexually abused it is a matter of shame. His masculinity will be questioned. People will make fun of the boy” (Gayatri, female caregiver). The reply of a boy quoted earlier also underlined this. The boy said that “(I) felt I was not a man” (Amit, boy victim of sexual abuse, 17 years) after the incident of abuse.

This evidently brings out one of the established points that men and boys perceive ‘being penetrated’ in sexual relationships as feminine and ‘penetrating’ as masculine (Rakesh cited in Dasgupta et al. 2000; Hollerbach, Khan and Khan, 2014). In this regard, this dominant heterosexuality and masculinity in the social context dismissed same sex interactions in the name of homo-sociality thereby ignoring scope of violence within it.

Lack of proper sexuality education in schools<sup>16</sup> is also equally contributing to this culture of silence on sexuality. Teachers, CWC and JJB members unanimously agreed on this point. A couple of teachers stated that in number of instances they ignored the sexualized behaviours of boys in schools as they were not confident to deal with it. The response of parents discussed in one of the above sections, i.e. beating their children evidently points out to the larger culture of silence on sexuality.

The above discussion apparently brought out interaction between different factors such as parents, family, media, peers and the larger patriarchal culture in shaping the experiences and perspectives of boys. Although the exploration of interaction between various factors went along with the propositions of Bronfenbrenner (1979), the present study illustrated a slightly different picture in relation to the influencing factors. Media was found the most influencing

<sup>16</sup>Though the Government of India made an effort to launch an Adolescent Education Programme in 2005 to provide sexuality education, it was reframed later due to stiff resistance from various sections of society. However it was argued that sexuality in the programme was bounded by physiological facts rather than considering sexuality as a social construct (Anandhi, 2007).

and probably a detrimental factor in shaping the experiences and perspectives of boys in the context of sexuality.

## **10. Interventions within the Laws and Provisions and beyond**

As explained in the review of related literature, the JJ Act, 2015 and POCSO, Act 2012 indeed provided scope of interventions. Therefore the organizations associated with the legal system and CWC as well as JJB members were aware about the issues of sexual abuse and offensive sexual behaviour of boys. Even though their engagements with boys were found limited, they shared about their interventions within the legal framework and challenges faced.

Reflecting findings of the investigations on implementing of POCSO, Act 2012 (National Law School of India, 2016; Ali, Adenwalla and Punekar, 2017), Aarambh-Mumbai, one of the organizations working with CWC shared that they received less cases of boys (around 7 percent out of the total cases of child sexual abuse) in comparison with girls. The similar trend was mentioned by Tulir-Chennai, another organization intervening in this area independently. The organization associated with CWC, works within the provisions of the Act and ensures proper rehabilitation of the victims<sup>17</sup>.

The organization supports CWC through social investigation, providing counselling, supporting the victim and family including in the legal process and ensuring rehabilitation. Along with conducting researches they also provide trainings to various stakeholders on the issue, the Act and their roles and responsibilities.

The organization that works independently on this issue gets cases through parents of victims and stakeholders. They also shared that adult males voluntarily contacted the organization and shared their childhood abusive experiences as they came to know about the

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<sup>17</sup> There are number of non-governmental organizations in the country working with CWC and JJB and engage with children within the provisions in the Acts. HAQ, Delhi, Aarambh, Mumbai, Arpan, Mumbai, are known for their work in the area of child sexual abuse.



organization through posters and newspapers. They support the victims and families to address their mental health issues through counselling and therapies, train different stakeholders and engage with the state on policies related to children.

The scope and challenges encountered by the organizations while supporting the victims and their families explored a couple of points in the context of boys. Both organizations agreed that younger boys shared and engaged with the interventions better than older/adolescent boys. The counsellor indicated that adolescents seemed reluctant, probably due to their notions of self-identity and masculinity. Further it was mentioned that rapport building with boys from all age groups, especially adolescents was difficult and time consuming.

Gender of the case worker and counsellor was pointed out as an issue which in turn has implications on the healing process. The female counsellor said: “We don’t have a lot of male social workers or counsellors, so to tell a woman, a didi [elder sister] about this is a little bit difficult for them. They take a lot of time to build a rapport with us” (Shreya, female service provider).

Both the organizations mentioned about trauma experienced by the boys due to sexual abuse. The counsellor of the organization dealing with the cases referred through CWC said that most of the children did not show any symptoms listed in the checklists/tools for assessing trauma, but she observed a lot of guilt feeling among boys due to the cultural shame attached to sexual abuse.

The other organization located this issue of trauma and limited sharing of boys on its elements within a larger framework of ‘understanding of sexual violence’ in the social context. It was elaborated by the Director of the organization that there is no understanding of sexual violence and sexual aggression is conceptualized based on injury and pregnancy. Since boys do not get pregnant and (in most of the cases) due to absence of physical violence, people would not consider it seriously and would not seek support.

It was said that adult survivors who came to the organization were not clear about what was happening to them and because of the same reason; they did not know they had to disclose it. Moreover, children were not able to articulate well what they were going through due to various fears and situations they were in. In contrast, the organization noticed that when adults recount their trauma, they were able to better describe what happened to them, how it impacted their childhood, their careers and relationships. This observation goes along with the findings on trauma based on memories of adult survivors (Gill and Tutty, 1998a; 1998b; Alaggia 2008; Price-Robertson, 2012; Turmel and Liles, 2015).

In the healing process the organization working with cases that came through CWC found using Trauma-Focused Cognitive Behavioural Therapy [TB-CBT] was helpful. It was said that they do not use any tools or techniques in assessing trauma and monitoring progress of the intervention. The organization directly working on this issue accented the need of mental health interventions to address trauma. Nevertheless resonating experiences, the Director said that parents were not aware and sensitive about the mental health issues of boys caused by sexual abuse. As a result parents did not come forward with boys for therapy.

It is clear from the sharing that parents voluntarily do not turn up for counselling and therapies unless cases are reported to the legal system. Referring to the legal system however doesnot ensure the justice to all the victims. One of the JJB members in Delhi, who worked as a CWC member told that as “trial is tedious and a complex process, most of the cases were voluntarily dismissed” (Vrinda, female service provider).

The JJB member further mentioned that often a mismatch between recorded statement of victims, evidences and forensic science reports created difficulties in the court to prove the cases there by resulting in low conviction rates in comparison with reported cases. This observation went along with the recent analysis in which it was found

that only one in every six cases results in conviction (National Law School of India, 2016).

Role of parents in the process of healing and accessing justice was apparently highlighted in the above discussion. Adding to this, the counsellor of the organization said that ‘if the parents are supportive then the process of recovery is much faster’. Considering their role, the organization conducts sessions with parents including parenting skills. But at the same time, the counsellor mentioned about the challenges of working with parents, especially fathers due to the age gap with them.

The organization indicated challenges of engaging with police as well. A case of a boy was highlighted in which the police disbelieved the incident of abuse as the victim was a boy who followed non-conforming gender practices. The Director of the organization said that “the norm is a female victim. If the victim is a male, it is slightly off the norm”. As mentioned earlier, this disbelief reflected the larger culture and its perspective on sexual violence. During the key informant interviews this point was underscored by the CWC and JJB members.

Experiences of JJB members while supporting children in conflict with law (CCL) revealed that boys from this category are more stigmatized than any other group. According to the JJB member, “CCL boys were often humiliated in front of their parents and in the process they became victims of character assassination” (Vrinda, female service provider). Though legal-aid was provided to these boys, their rehabilitation is an area of concern. Lack of useful and meaningful vocational courses for these boys is a hurdle to ensure proper rehabilitation. They also mentioned about lack of support from parents of CCL boys and highlighted the need for working with them (Vrinda, female service provider and Suman, female service provider).

Beyond the interventions within the legal provisions, a few organizations<sup>18</sup> are working with men to address violence against women through campaigns and sessions with boys on sexuality. While most of the organizations working with young men, Equal Community Foundation (ECF), Pune and Praajak, Kolkata work with boys in communities through different programmes to promote gender equity. It is observed that directly working with young men and boys made a difference in their attitudes and life (Verma et al 2006; Vibhad, Kamble and Postles 2013).

It can be summarized from the discussion that existing interventions in the country are within the laws and legal provisions and thus limited in its scope to deal with the issues and ambiguities of boys emanating from their evolving interaction with the environment.

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<sup>18</sup> Centre for Health and Social Justice, Delhi, Men's Action to Stop Violence against Women, Uttar Pradesh, Praajak, Kolkata are examples of a few organizations working in India.

# Conclusion

The exploration outlined distinct and diverse experiences and perspectives of boys in the context of masculinities and sexuality. It unravelled intersection of dominant notions of masculinities and sexuality in shaping everyday life of the boys including abusive as well harmful sexual behaviour. Dominant notions of masculinities were defined in tandem with notions of femininities and a responsible and caring (heterosexual) household provider was found as the dominant masculine expression, locally understood as *asli mard* (real man) in the social context. Being virile was perceived as intrinsically linked together with the masculine articulation, '*asli mard*'. The experiences of boys revealed that they were encouraged and taught this masculinity since childhood.

The study revealed intricacies in childhood sexual experiences. Abusive, consensual and harmful sexual behaviour experiences of boys unsettled the exclusive focus on abuse and offensive behaviour of children in the body of knowledge and acknowledged child sexuality as normal. In contrast to their diverse sexual experiences, boys perceived heterosexuality within marriage and legal definitions as socially conforming sexual behaviour. In this regard boys dismissed their own experiences of child/adolescent sexuality and located love and desire or sex within adulthood thereby going along with the dominant construction of sexuality in the social context. Love, marriage and having sex were found inextricable in their perspective. Thus majority of the boys associated the meaning of sexuality with procreation, though a section in their lived experiences articulated the meaning in terms of pleasure in the context of romantic relationships.

Acceptance of violence in multiple situations of anger in intimate sexual relationships revealed the way varying forms of violence were normalized and inextricably embedded in dominant notions of masculinities in the social context. Thus the dominant notions on masculinities and sexuality and its intersection were found important in defining experiences and perspectives of subjects. Presenting a slightly different picture in relation to the influencing factors, the study found media as the most influencing and probably detrimental factor in shaping the understanding of boys along with parents, family and peers in the context of sexuality.

Analysis of responses of government as well non-government organizations to address sexual violence against boys illustrated that the existing interventions in the country are within the laws and legal provisions and thus limited in its scope to deal with the issues and ambiguities of boys in the context of masculinities and sexuality emanating from their evolving interaction with the environment.

# Recommendations

The silence surrounding sex, sexuality and sexual violence against boys need to be broken. In a society with deeply entrenched patriarchal values, it will be an uphill task; however, a beginning has to be made. The fact that the national GOI study (2007) has clearly highlighted that higher percentage of boys' experienced sexual abuse, this data was not taken seriously enough to address it.

There is no doubt that foremost we need more extensive research on this subject. Qualitative studies focusing on subjective (boys) experiences of trauma within the framework of social construction would be helpful in expanding the body of knowledge; which today revolves around psychological understanding of trauma based on the experiences of girls. There is a lack of such researches, which could deepen our understanding of boys experiencing sexual violence as well as their notions of sex, sexuality and masculinities. This micro study has brought us insights into some of these aspects, but also thrown up further questions to be answered.

## **Primary Interventions:**

Democratising the family would be a first step. To work and dialogue with families to redraw the hierarchal structure of the family. The responsibilities to be shared by all. This would not be easy, but it is not an impossibility.

CSOs/NGOs working with children/families/communities need to do intense work with boys on issues of understanding one's emotions, anger management, acceptable and unacceptable behaviour,

positive relationships, sex, sexuality, masculinity, safeguarding issues, patriarchy, gender equity and democratic values. A life skills education that focuses on the above too.

Both boys and girls to be taught how to use technology responsibly... especially WhatsApp, MMS, Facebook. The dangers of participating in chat sites, dark websites, pornographic sites needs to be acknowledged and appropriate interventions to be introduced.

Community child safeguarding mechanisms. Awareness programmes on sexual violence of both boys and girls. Initiate discussions on gender equity; laws that protect and prevent violence against children. Awareness regarding all entitlements for children and economically and socially marginalised communities.

### **Secondary Interventions:**

- School curriculum to have lessons/sessions on sex and sexuality.
- Teachers to be trained on the subject and be knowledgeable of how to guide children on these issues. The teachers should not hesitate to discuss about sex and sexuality with their students. Teachers to be made aware that boys can and are sexually abused.
- Teachers to be made aware about online sexual violence (dark websites) and use of technology in sexually violating a child or its use by children to get information on sex.
- Children to be given orientation about use of technology responsibly.
- School to have trained counsellors/social workers to support a child in crisis/trauma. The Counsellors and Social workers also need to be oriented on the issue of sexual violence and that boys can and are sexually violated, and need support.
- All children must know whom to approach for help when required.



- Parents - Teachers session should be organised on this issue. Parents to be made aware that boys can be a victim of sexual violence. Further more, to orient them, that interest and exploration about sex is part of growing up.
- Child Safeguarding Policy to be in place in all schools and Child Care Institutions (CCI). Protocols and SOPs in place and known to all staff, volunteers, interns, visitors, and children. All the points mentioned in earlier paragraphs, holds true to CCI staff too.

### **Tertiary Interventions:**

- There would have to be concerted efforts at community, state and national level to create an awareness about sexual violence against boys.
- Advocate at national level to have mechanisms in place to support boys who experience sexual violence. Presently there are safe spaces/canters for girls and women who are victims of sexual violence.
- To have trained personnel such as social workers, caseworkers and lawyers to support boys.
- To have trained medical professionals to examine a boy victim and write medical reports.
- Media, to be made aware that both boys and girls can be victims of sexual violence. Encourage journalists to write about this issue so that the prevailing silence can be broken, and the boys without fear or shame can seek support.
- Entertainment industry to be persuaded not to produce TV serials or movies that reinforce patriarchal values, male dominance and portrayal of males as strong, aggressive, violent and glorification of it. Portrayal of men as having freedom to cross boundaries of unacceptable behaviour but not women. The study has shown that boys are very much influenced by media. This is an area of concern.

- The Ministry of Information and Broadcasting to develop guidelines for entertainment industry.
- The Ministry of Technology to amend the policies regarding what websites will not be allowed and how to regulate the service providers. The Ministry is already working on it and amendments have been made to the Act.

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163/4, Pradhan Wali Gali, Village Jaunapur, New Delhi - 110047. India.  
E : [butterfliesngo@gmail.com](mailto:butterfliesngo@gmail.com) | W : [www.butterfliesngo.org](http://www.butterfliesngo.org) | T : +91 99993 21098