

## 'Perception of Masculinity': Study on Why Sexual Abuse of Boys Is Underreported

Men identified with two roles in the family system – being a provider and a protector of girls.

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A multi-country study of young boys who have survived sexual assault showed that the issue remains unacknowledged and under-addressed, owing to the perception that "boys cannot be abused."

The study was conducted across India, Nepal, Cambodia and Philippines, with the interview of 122 boys and young men, between 12 and 25, who were sexually abused. The study also included 87 parents or caregivers and 75 key informants.

The study was led by the United Kingdom (UK)-based Family for Every Child (FFEC), a global alliance of 41 local civil society organisations from 37 countries, while the India chapter of the study was led by the NGO Butterflies in India.

Across the four countries, men identified with two roles within the family system – being a provider and a protector of girls.

**"Dominant notions of masculinity serve to instruct boys that they must be strong and independent and that they are responsible for what happens to them. Boys are reproached differently to girls for their abuse, for example being seen as weak for 'allowing it to happen', and, where the abuser is male, stigmatised as deviant,"** the report said.

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This leads to the dominant perception that "boys can't be abused," the report said.

**"Widespread incomprehension about the potential for sexual violence against boys is mirrored in embarrassment amongst caregivers, community members and boys themselves, and disbelief by authority figures, contributing to under-reporting and social isolation."**

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The report stressed on how silence surrounding any discussion of sexual violence against boys can "aggravate trauma and exacerbate their vulnerability to further abuse."

"It added that like in the case of sexual abuse among minor girls, the perpetrator is often known to the young boys, and that they may use the stigma surrounding male-to-male sex, as well as money and gifts, to ensure that their victims do not speak up," the report added.

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