

Why sexual abuse among young boys remains unaddressed

The study said boys receive less protection due to the freedom that they enjoy in comparison to girls



Amrita Madhukalya, DHNS, New Delhi, APR 13 2022, 21:59 IST UPDATED: APR 14 2022, 08:32 IST



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A multi-country study on young boys who have survived sexual abuse has revealed that while 1 in 6 boys experiences sexual abuse globally, abuse among them remains largely unacknowledged and unaddressed, owing to the dominant perception that boys cannot be abused.

The study, conducted in India, Nepal, Cambodia and the Philippines, said that boys receive less protection due to the freedom that they enjoy in comparison to girls.

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," the findings of the report stated.

The study was conducted by partner NGOs of these countries who are part of the UK-based Family for Every Child (FFEC), a global alliance of 41 local civil society organisations from 37 countries. In India, the study was conducted by the NGO Butterflies.

Findings in India stated that a majority of abusers were those known to the boys and young men. This included close relatives, neighbours, older friends and adult acquaintances.

“Challenging the stereotype, that men are the perpetrators, it was found that along with men, women and older boys or peers were also the perpetrators using varying strategies ranging from explicit use of force and threat to persuasion to sometimes giving gifts and money for sexually abusing the boys,” the report revealed.

The study in the four countries revealed that the dominant perception regarding sexual abuse of boys, sexuality and masculinity is that sexual violence in children happens to girls and if boys are sexually abused, it is an aberration. The silence surrounding any discussion of sexual violence against boys can aggravate trauma and exacerbate their vulnerability to further abuse, the report added.