

## Caring for boys and girls affected by sexual violence through integrated, targeted services



Globally, millions of girls and boys affected by sexual violence are in critical need of quality, effective services. Around 120 million girls have experienced forced sexual acts at some point in their lifetime. Although boys are also at risk, and in some countries at similar or higher rates to girls, there is currently no global estimate as to the scale of the problem. Drawing upon our collective experience in preventing family separation and supporting children's care, Family for Every Child understands and promotes the critical role of parents and caregivers in protecting boys and girls from sexual violence and supporting their recovery. Dually, we call attention to the heightened risk of sexual violence for particular groups of children, such as those living outside families or without any adult care.

### **Harmful gender norms mean that sexual violence against boys is frequently unreported or ignored.**

Family for Every Child's 2018 report [Caring for Boys Affected by Sexual Violence](#) highlighted how boys rarely disclose sexual violence, or access specialist services. Gender norms lead many boys to fear being stigmatised, or being seen as weak, if they report. Those same social norms often prevent parents and caregivers from recognising that boys can be sexually abused. The fact that boys rarely disclose sexual violence or access services keeps their experiences hidden. Even when children do report, national laws often fail to criminalise all forms of sexual abuse, for boys and for girls. Support services are inconsistent both in terms of coverage and quality. Acknowledging the concerted global efforts to protect girls from sexual violence over recent decades, we underscore the need to do more to include boys to the fullest extent possible in prevention and response efforts.

### **Evidence supports that specific groups of children are at heightened risk of sexual violence.**

Despite the increased vulnerability to sexual violence of particular groups of children within societies, the vast majority of prevention interventions target all children or whole communities. It is critical to understand which families are more at risk or at risk in specific ways. It is also essential to know how to support parents and caregivers to provide safe, loving care, and how to build the resilience and support networks of children and families. This will enable parents and caregivers to create a safe environment in which to perform their role of helping their children to develop and grow. There is an urgent need for targeted, well evaluated, prevention interventions that enable resources to be invested where they are needed most.

### **Recommendations**

As a global alliance of civil society organisations working together across 31 countries to improve the lives of children, Family for Every Child calls upon donor partners, policy makers and fellow practitioners to:

#### **Address harmful cultural attitudes and perceptions around sexual violence by supporting parents and caregivers to:**

- Easily access high quality information on child sexual abuse, grooming, the internet and online relationships, and to provide appropriate information and guidance about sex and

relationships to children.

- Challenge prevailing taboos around sex and relationships and harmful social norms around gender and masculinity, including social norms that lead to boys to be perceived as perpetrators when they disclose that they have been sexually abused, or lead them to be criminalised when displaying problematic sexual behaviour.

### **Close the gap for boys in the child protection system through:**

- Accurate measurement of the global scale of sexual violence against boys and the key barriers to reporting and accessing support.
- The provision of laws and the implementation of policies that are applicable to boys, and do not stigmatise or criminalise boys who have experienced sexual violence.
- The provision of services (legal, medical and psychosocial) within a therapeutic environment for children and families, to enable full recovery from sexual violence; including integrated, boy-sensitive services, and safe temporary care for boys when needed.

### **Build on the practice experience and research of Family for Every Child in this area to:**

- Develop and provide specialised educational and support services for children at heightened risk of sexual violence, such as those living outside of families or without any adult care, those from the LGBTQI+ community, those with disabilities, those whose parents are engaged in transactional sex, and those living in insecure communities.
- Provide interventions to address family conflict, including domestic violence, alcohol and substance misuse, and parental trauma which may make children more likely to experience sexual violence.
- Include children with disabilities in sex education and encourage caregivers and other service providers to recognise and respond appropriately to their burgeoning sexual maturity.
- Ensure quality standards, codes of conduct and complaint mechanisms are in place to prevent sexual violence in institutional care, including specific measures to prevent sexual violence, and mandate institutions to report on incidents that occur and on how they are dealt with.

### **Family for Every Child stands committed to work with and support all those working towards a safer, better future for all children.**

All children, including the most vulnerable, have the right to grow up in stable and caring families and communities, protected from sexual violence and its effects. Governments and service providers have critical roles to play in ensuring these rights are upheld for all children across all contexts, and Family for Every Child will continue to work to ensure the practical implementation and protection of these rights across all contexts.