

Launch of the Special Issue International Journal of Child Abuse and Neglect: Global Insights on the Sexual Exploitation of Boys

Tuesday June 27th at 7pm Bangkok/1pm London/8am New York

This Special Issue of Child Abuse and Neglect includes six new empirical papers that shed new light on the sexual exploitation of boys. The issue begins with a global systematic scoping literature review that identified 81 publications from 38 countries on the topic. Additionally, five new empirical papers are presented, along with a brief commentary from Dr. Mark Capaldi, examining the evolution of this complex issue throughout his career.

The research focuses on the sexual exploitation of boys, predominantly representing lower- and middle-income countries. All papers in this Special Issue are available through open access. The editors would like to express their gratitude to the Oak Foundation for their generous support, which greatly increases the availability of this research to a truly global audience.

Read the full Special Issue [here](#).

Key takeaway points:

- Social and gender norms play a crucial role in understanding the sexual exploitation of boys. These norms shape societal attitudes and behaviors related to boys' vulnerability and the perpetration of exploitation.
- Addressing the challenges of conducting social-psychological research in lower- and middle-income countries (LMIC) is essential for gaining a comprehensive understanding of global issue of the sexual exploitation of boys.
- Researching sexual exploitation with boys and gender-diverse young people requires sensitivity to their unique experiences. Their specific needs, vulnerabilities, and perspectives should be considered when conducting studies and interventions.
- The growing body of global evidence on the sexual exploitation of boys can contribute to improving prevention efforts and response strategies. By prioritizing psychological safety and enhancing access to support services, interventions can be better tailored to meet the needs of victims and survivors.

Paper 1: [A Global Systematic Scoping Review of Literature on the Sexual Exploitation of Boys](#)

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chiabu.2023.106244>

Corinne Moss, Savannah Jordan Smith, Katherine Kim, Noella Noronha, Nicholas Hua, Mark Kavenagh & Christine Wekerle.

Background: Sexual exploitation of children (SEC) is an egregious crime with significant rights, development, and health import. Relative to girls, boys have less attention in the research. While locale-specific factors likely shape the risk, a common facilitator may be societal masculine gender norms. Norms denying and denouncing boys 'vulnerability, in favor of perceptions of high agency and responsibility, may contribute to professional failures to recognize and respond adequately to their sexual exploitation. Services specific to boy victims are generally absent.

Objective: Our aim is to examine the state of the research on sexually exploited boys internationally. We update and add to the extant reviews in considering prevalence, as well as offender and victimization parameters, utilizing both the peer-reviewed and gray literature.

Participants and Setting: Studies from the years 2000 to 2022 that included samples of boys under age 18, or sex-disaggregated data for children under 18, were included. Case studies, systematic reviews, and those reporting on retrospective experiences by adults over 18 were excluded. A total of 254,744 boys were represented across studies.

Methods: A systematic scoping review considered qualitative and quantitative peer reviewed publications from eight, English-language databases. English and non-English non-peer reviewed publications ('gray literature') was identified by both ECPAT International's global network of member organizations and citation chaining.

Results: Overall, 81 documents from 38 countries were included. In total, 254,744 youth participated in peer-reviewed studies (N=217,726) and gray literature (N=37,018). Between 1% and 5% of boys report sexual exploitation; higher rates occur in vulnerable contexts (e.g., 10%, trans youth; 26%, street-connected youth). Boys report SEC primarily between 12 and 18 years old. Risk factors include family dysfunction, child maltreatment and parental substance misuse. Correlates of SEC victimization include mental and physical health concerns, particularly sexual health. Post-traumatic stress was rarely evaluated. Evidence-based treatments were not available for these boys, which may be related to a lack of gender-based theoretical models for understanding SEC specifically.

Conclusion: Boys experiencing sexual exploitation face sex- and gender-specific challenges, from service invisibility to dismissive and permissive attitudes to their exploitation, to gender discrimination and household rejection. Greater recognition of trauma is needed, including attention to mental health support within a trauma informed lens. Ongoing surveillance of all forms of violence against children is important for multisectoral practice as are policies aimed to prevent SEC through developmentally appropriate awareness raising for boys.

Author Biographies



Corinne Moss has recently completed a Bachelor of Health Sciences at McMaster University and Master of Education for Healthcare Professionals at the University of Ottawa. This fall, she will be entering Limerick Medical School. With a focus in mental health, her research includes childhood maltreatment, youth resilience, and Indigenous health. Her recent publication, *A Global Systematic Review of Literature on the Sexual Exploitation of Boys* (Moss et al., 2023), draws attention to boy victimization and advances our duty to protect all children.



Savanah Smith, MSc, RP (Qualifying), is a passionate mental health professional with expertise in gender affirming research and care. She holds a Bachelor of Arts in Psychology (Research Specialist Stream) from Wilfrid Laurier University (2015) and a Masters of Science in Psychotherapy from McMaster University. With a background in community-based research and youth mental health projects, Savanah has contributed to McMaster's Office of Community Engagement and the department of Pediatrics. Currently, she provides perinatal mental health services to women and birthing persons in an outpatient mental health setting.



Katherine Kim is currently a medical student at the University of Toronto (Class of 2025). She completed her undergraduate degree in the Bachelor of Health Sciences program at McMaster University. Her career aspirations include primary healthcare and serving marginalized populations.



Noella Noronha works in the pharmaceutical industry, specifically focusing on Global Hematology Studies. She completed her undergraduate and graduate studies at McMaster University. Noella is highly engaged in research writing, with a particular interest in well-being and technology. She is also committed to pursuing ongoing education in the healthcare field.



Nicholas Hua is a 23-year-old health science trainee who has been working with Dr. Wekerle for the past 3 years (Master of Science in Global Health). Passionate about combating CSE, he has co-authored on two global review papers, and hopes to carry forward raising awareness on the need for safeguarding children globally. Nick is a physician candidate at the University of Toronto in Toronto, Ontario, Canada.



Dr Mark Kavenagh is Director of Evident, a research consultancy based in Bangkok, Thailand that focuses on child online protection. Mark has done research and child protection programming in the Asia-Pacific region as far back as before Facebook. He is most proud of his work to design and lead the Disrupting Harm project – new vital evidence regarding online child sexual exploitation and abuse in 13 African and Southeast Asian countries. Most recently, Mark and Evident have supported ChildFund Australia to refresh their Swipe Safe online safety training program for children and parents in Vietnam, Cambodia, Timor-Leste and Indonesia.



Dr. Christine Wekerle is a research scientist who has spent the last 30 years publishing in the areas of pediatric mental health, resilience, and well-being. She has worked with diverse populations: children, adolescents, Indigenous youth living on reserve, street-involved youth, substance treatment seeking adults, youth receiving services from child welfare, and former youth in care. Dr. Wekerle has developed prevention programming for adolescent dating violence and adolescent resilience. The most recent is the JoyPop app to support crafting daily resilience routing. She has a rights- and responsibility-lens with a focus on sex and gender-based analysis and contexts of adversity.

Paper 2: [Enhancing a survivor-centred approach to healthcare provision in Afghanistan: Understanding and addressing the barriers faced by male victims/ survivors of sexual violence](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chiabu.2022.105854)

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chiabu.2022.105854>

Julienne Corboz, Laura Pasquero, Charu Lata Hogg & Abdul Rasheed

Background: Men and boys may experience sexual violence, particularly in conflict settings. However, in Afghanistan little is known about the barriers they face accessing healthcare services.

Objective: The objectives are to identify barriers to healthcare provision for male victims/survivors of sexual violence in Afghanistan and identify ways to enhance survivor-centred healthcare.

Participants and setting: Data were collected in three provinces with adult male victims/survivors of sexual violence (n = 27), healthcare providers (n = 44), and community health workers (n = 26). Boys were not interviewed due to ethical reasons; however, we include retrospective analysis where possible.

Methods: The methods include semi-structured, qualitative interviews with participants. Data were analyzed thematically according to a social ecological model of public health. The study was ethically approved by the Afghan Ministry of Public Health.

Results: Male victims/survivors of sexual violence in Afghanistan face multiple and cumulative barriers to accessing healthcare services. Stigmatization and fears of being sexually abused by healthcare providers are particularly accentuated for those victims/survivors with diverse sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, and sex characteristics (SOGIESC). Boy victims/ survivors also face particular barriers, including healthcare providers' lack of knowledge of the evolving capacities of the child.

Conclusions: Survivor-centred healthcare response to male victims/survivors of sexual violence should address barriers at multiple levels of the social ecological model and respond to the needs of male victims.

Author Biographies



Dr Julienne Corboz is an independent consultant specialising in the prevention of and response to gender-based violence (GBV), with a focus on fragile and conflict-affected settings. She obtained her PhD in Anthropology from the University of Melbourne and has more than 20 years of experience supporting and leading research, evaluation and capacity building projects in various geographical settings, particularly in South Asia, Sub-Saharan Africa and the MENA region.



Laura Pasquero has been working on sexual and gender-based violence prevention and response within the human rights, humanitarian and international relief fields in Sub-Saharan Africa, MENA, Europe, Latin America and Asia-Pacific primarily in conflict and displacement settings. She regularly supports gender transformative work within international agencies, governments, national and international NGOs and academia. Laura joined All Survivors Project in 2017 as Senior Humanitarian Advisor. She graduated in International Relations from the University of Turin (Italy), obtained a Master's in Human Rights and Democratisation from the Global Campus of Human Rights, and qualified as an Independent Sexual Violence Advocate (ISVA) from the University of Worcester (UK).



Ms. Charu Lata Hogg is the Founder Director of All Survivors Project. She is also an Associate Fellow at Chatham House, covering political and human rights developments in South and Southeast Asia since 2004. Previously, she worked as a South Asia researcher for Human Rights Watch, documenting human rights violations in Nepal and Sri Lanka. Prior to joining Chatham House, she worked as an international journalist in India, Sri Lanka, and London for publications including Far Eastern Economic Review, BBC-South Asia Regional Unit, India Today, and The Times of India. Charu has conducted extensive research on sexual violence in Sri Lanka and provided expert evidence in a UK Upper Tribunal Country Guidance case in 2013. She holds a Bachelor of Arts in History from Hindu College, University of Delhi, and an MSc in International Relations from the London School of Economics and Political Science.



Abdul Rasheed MD, MPH, is the founder and executive director of Youth Health and Development Organization (YHDO) in Afghanistan. With a background in public health and experience working for the WHO country office, he has conducted significant research on HIV epidemiology and prevention, focusing on sexual and gender minority groups and sexual violence against boys and young men in Afghanistan. Abdul Rasheed has played a pivotal role in designing HIV prevention programs for key populations, including MSM and TG individuals. He is recognized for his advocacy work and received the international Human Rights Defender Award in 2013.


Paper 3: [Frontline support services for boys who have experienced child sexual exploitation: A thematic review of survey data from seven countries](#)

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chiabu.2023.106077>


Marie Nodzenski & Jarrett Davis

Child sexual exploitation and abuse (CSEA) affects all children, but research on the needs and experiences of boys is lacking, support services are limited, and workers lack specialized training to meet their specific needs. This paper explores the perspectives and experiences of 404 Frontline Support Workers providing services to children with CSEA experiences in seven countries, considering trends and implications for boys. A mixed-methods online survey of 121 questions explores characteristics of cases, perceived vulnerabilities, and gender-based challenges in CSEA response. A descriptive analysis of survey data, disaggregated by country, was conducted, allowing for a discussion of broad themes and trends. Despite differences, participants described similar vulnerabilities for boys across these contexts, including poverty as well as sex and sexuality-related taboos, stigmas, and other gendered beliefs, which were perceived to not only increase vulnerability to CSEA but also complicate disclosure in all countries. The implications of these findings on service delivery and recommendations are discussed.

Author Biographies



Marie Nodzenski is a PhD candidate at the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine (UK). Her research focuses on understanding the factors influencing mental health in young male trafficking survivors in the Mekong Region. She also examines how post-trafficking services address these mental health issues. Prior to joining LSHTM, Marie worked as a Research Associate at the Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy (National University of Singapore), where she studied regional health governance in ASEAN, particularly the healthcare access of migrant workers. Marie holds a BA in Political Science and an MA in International Relations from the University of Kent (UK). Currently based in Hong Kong SAR.



Jarrett Davis has designed and evaluated evidence-based research and programs for children and vulnerable individuals impacted by sexual exploitation and violence, for the past 15 years. His work has covered various global contexts, including projects on harmful sexual behaviors among children in Cambodia, street-working children in the Philippines, Cambodia, and Thailand, as well as children and young people involved in sex trading. With a focus on post-colonial settings and the intersections of race, class, gender, and sexuality, Jarrett prioritizes the lived experiences of these individuals in his research. He emphasizes the need for accessible and understandable data to facilitate effective communication between programmatic and policy realms.

Paper 4: [“She was willing to send me there”: Intrafamilial child sexual abuse, exploitation and trafficking of boys](#)

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chiabu.2022.105849>

Ena Lucia Mariaca Pacheco, Andres Eduardo Buenaventura & Glenn Michael Miles

Background: Boys subject to intrafamilial child sexual exploitation and abuse (CSEA) - in particular, cases which begin as incest and later evolve into child trafficking for sexual exploitation - face many barriers in disclosing their exploitation, often leaving victims and survivors feeling isolated from society and dismissed or mishandled by service providers such as law enforcement officers, child protection specialists, medical staff and mental health professionals.

Objective: This study explores the unique characteristics of intrafamilial CSEA through the sex trafficking of boys, and the barriers to disclosure and recovery experienced by male victims and survivors.

Participants and setting: Ten adult male survivors of intrafamilial child trafficking for sexual exploitation were interviewed multiple times to gain a deeper understanding of intrafamilial CSEA and how it compares and contrasts with non-familial CSEA. Participants in this study primarily came from North America.

Methodology: Multiple semi-structured online interviews were conducted with these 10 adult male survivors because they experienced 1) intrafamilial CSEA and 2) being trafficked by their families to be sexually exploited by non-familial perpetrators. The participants were then asked to compare and contrast intrafamilial and non-familial CSEA. The research team employed a descriptive phenomenological approach and interview transcripts were coded, analyzed, and compared to identify patterns of non-verbal CSEA indicators and thematic narratives. The study also explored the internal and external barriers to disclosure reported by participants. Trauma-informed, person-centered practices were used throughout the entirety of the study to minimize harm to participants. The research team employed a co-productive approach using participants' initial interviews and feedback to formulate new questions for later rounds of interviews and by having the participants confirm the accuracy of their respective quotes and case summaries.

Results and discussion: This study highlights several CSEA modalities, such as “boy-swap” events and local/national/transnational trafficking rings engaged in CSEA of boys. It also discusses how survivors' experiences differed between intrafamilial and non-familial CSEA and trafficking, and how familial settings may facilitate concealment of CSEA. Participants described various modus operandi used by abusers, traffickers, and buyers of all genders. While all 10 intrafamilial CSEA cases included male perpetrators, female perpetrators were also present in nine of them. In addition, participants identified various psychological and physiological CSEA and trafficking indicators that evidenced their victimization during their childhood years. All 10 survivors reported long-term health consequences into adulthood and scored highly on Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) questionnaires.

Author Biographies



Ena Lucia Mariaca Pacheco, MA, is a trauma-informed professional in human security, with a master's specialization in male survivors of child sexual abuse and human trafficking for sexual exploitation. She has worked with the Government of Canada, non-governmental organizations, international organizations, and lived-experts on research, policy writing, human rights advocacy work, and global projects focused on supporting victims and survivors. Ena Lucia is a trainer and speaker and has presented her research at international conferences, trained frontline professionals, and is published in the Child Abuse and Neglect Journal special edition on boys.



Andrés Eduardo Buenaventura, MA, is an independent human security researcher, strategic policy advisor and learning & development officer, with a master's degree in international security. He has worked at an international police organization for more than 10 years in diverse roles and is a strategy consultant and instructor for Your ECHO, an NGO dedicated to educational and cultural development in Yemen.



Dr. Glenn Miles, PHD, is a Senior Researcher with up! International. For 25 years, he's led INGOs and facilitated research listening to survivors of sexual exploitation, including men, women, boys, girls, and transgender people, as well as research with sex buyers. Glenn teaches graduate and PhD candidates, provides supervision, and advises the Butterfly Longitudinal Research Project (Chab Dai).

Paper 5: [Sexual exploitation of children: Barriers for boys in accessing social supports for victimization](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chiabu.2023.106129).

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chiabu.2023.106129>

Mark Kavanagh, Nicolas Hua, Christina Wekerle

Background: The global evidence regarding sexual exploitation of children (SEC) is expanding, however, the majority of research continues to focus on girls. ECPAT International's Global Boys Initiative is a major contribution to broadening knowledge by exploring how sexual exploitation impacts boys specifically.

Objective: This discussion paper explores data from the initiative to better understand how boys and children of all genders may be impacted by sexual exploitation.

Participants and setting: During 2019–21, research was undertaken by ECPAT member organizations into the sexual exploitation of boys in 10 primarily low-and-middle income countries globally. The initiative also supported a global systematic scoping review of published and gray literature published in this issue (Moss et al., in press).

Methods: Gender norms analysis of Initiative data identifies critical thematic issues impairing access to support services for victimized boys.

Results and Conclusions: Most disconcerting is gender-based stigmatization from services that can compound children's trauma. Justice-based, rather than trauma-informed models of support predominate in responses for boys. Legal frameworks create barriers when binary gendered terminology defines sexual violence, thereby excluding anyone other than women and girls from protection. Three solutions emerged to improve access to support for more children affected by sexual exploitation: (1) challenge problematic gender norms and consequent practices, such as gendered terminology in legislation, that create barriers for boys and gender-diverse children; (2) create psychologically, emotionally, and physically safe circumstances (i.e. trauma-informed care) for all children to know help-seeking is possible; and (3) undertake proactive support that specifically connects boys and gender-diverse children to therapeutic services like drop-in centers, night-time counselling, and emergency shelter.

Author Biographies



Nicholas Hua is a 23-year-old health science trainee who has been working with Dr. Wekerle for the past 3 years (Master of Science in Global Health). Passionate about combating CSE, he has co-authored on two global review papers, and hopes to carry forward raising awareness on the need for safeguarding children globally. Nick is a physician candidate at the University of Toronto in Toronto, Ontario, Canada.



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Dr. Christine Wekerle is a research scientist who has spent the last 30 years publishing in the areas of pediatric mental health, resilience, and well-being. She has worked with diverse populations: children, adolescents, Indigenous youth living on reserve, street-involved youth, substance treatment seeking adults, youth receiving services from child welfare, and former youth in care. Dr. Wekerle has developed prevention programming for adolescent dating violence and adolescent resilience. The most recent is the JoyPop app to support crafting daily resilience routing. She has a rights- and responsibility-lens with a focus on sex and gender-based analysis and contexts of adversity.

Paper 6: [Which groups are most affected by sexual violence? A disaggregated analysis by sex, age, and HIV-status of adolescents living in South Africa](#)

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chiabu.2022.105981>

Nontokozi Langwenya, Elona Toska, Heidi Stöckl, Lucie Cluver

Background: Estimates on sexual violence (SV) among adolescents are rarely disaggregated by key indicators.

Objective: We examine the independent effects of sex, age, HIV status and mode of HIV acquisition on the exposure to SC using generalised estimating equations models and proportional hazard model.

Participant and setting: Data from a 4-year prospective cohort study of 1447 adolescents (ages 10-19, 57% girls, 76% living with HIV in South Africa.

Methods: We describe the lifetime prevalence of the three forms of SC: non-contact (unwanted showing of private parts), contact (coerced sexual debut, attempted and completed forced or penetrative or oral sex,) and exploitative (sex in exchange for goods/money).

Results: Overall, 23,9% (95%CI = 21.7%-26.1%) reported exposure to SC at some point in their lives: non-contact = 5.7%, contact = 9,0% and exploitative + 15,8%. While girls reported higher rates of exploitative (18,4% vs 12,3%; $p < 0.001$) and contact SV (12.3% vs 4.6%; $p = 0.086$). Exposure to any SV doubled in late adolescence (10-14 years = 7.0% vs ≥ 15 years = 31.7%; aIRR = 2.07; 95%CI = 1.82-2.37). Though level of SV were comparable between those living with HIV were twice as likely to experience SV compared to adolescents who recently acquires HIV (42.3% vs 15.7%; aIRR = 2.03; 95%CI = 1.73-2.39). This association persisted when analysis was restricted to incidence SC during follow-up (aIRR = 1.54; 95%CI= 1.23-2.10).

Conclusion: Exposure to SC was high focus for both sexes, increased with age and more prevalent among adolescents who recently acquired HIV. SV prevention and response services must also be offered to boys and strengthened in HIV care services.

Author Biographies



Nontokozo Langwenya (eSwatini) is a co-Investigator for the HEY BABY study and DPhil Student at the University of Oxford, Department of Social Policy, and Intervention. Her research interest includes women's reproductive health and HIV and Sexual Violence prevention among children and adolescents. Together with the research from University of Cape Town and Oxford, she contributes in the conceptualization and management of research projects in Eastern and Southern Africa, as well as collaborates with UNICEF ESARO on best evidence to best support the lives of young people in the region.



Elona Toska is an adolescent health researcher at the Centre for Social Science Research at the University of Cape Town and a Research Associate at the University of Oxford. Her research focuses on identifying ways to support adolescents and young people, including adolescents living with HIV and adolescent parents, to have safe and healthy relationships with people in their lives: their children, partners, caregivers, teachers, and healthcare providers. She works closely with colleagues at UNICEF, UNFPA, UNAIDS, The Global Fund, USAID/ PEPFAR and government partners in Cameroon, Eswatini, Kenya, Lesotho, Mozambique, South Africa, Zambia, and Zimbabwe.



Heidi Stöckl, is a professor in public health evaluation at the Medical Faculty of the Ludwig-Maximilians-University Munich, Germany with more than 20 years of experience in researching the epidemiology of intimate partner violence, violence related mortality and human trafficking, including studies on the global prevalence of intimate partner homicide and perpetrators of child homicide. She is currently running the first longitudinal study among adult women on intimate partner violence in sub-Saharan Africa. She is a global advisor to the UN Trust Fund on Violence against Women and member of the Sexual Violence and Research Initiative Leadership Council.



Lucie Cluver is a Professor of Child and Family Social Work, in the Centre for Evidence-Based Social Intervention in the Department of Social Policy and Intervention, and an Honorary Professor in Psychiatry and Mental Health at the University of Cape Town. Lucie is lucky to work with an incredible and dedicated team of PhD students, postdoctoral researchers, and colleagues. Together, they lead large-scale longitudinal surveys and randomised controlled trials of interventions, combined with participatory research with adolescents and young people. She works closely with the South African government, UNDP, USAID-PEPFAR, UNICEF, UNAIDS, UNODC, the World Health Organisation and many other international agencies, to provide evidence that can improve the lives of children and adolescents in sub-Saharan Africa.

Commentary: [The sexual exploitation of boys: Lost on the margins of GBV responses?](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chiabu.2023.106218)

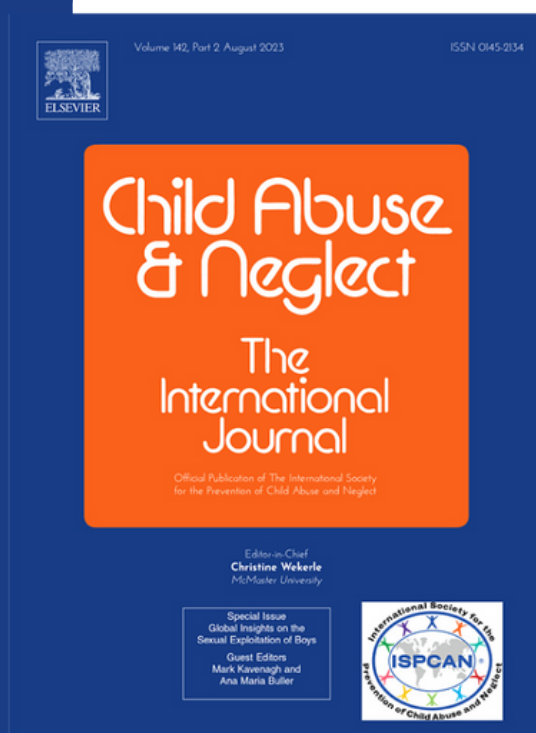
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chiabu.2023.106218>

Dr Mark Capaldi

Research into the sexual exploitation of boys has been sparse over the past two decades. In reality however, boys are exploited by a diverse range of people, This issue is complicated by the debate over whether the sexual exploitation of boys qualifies as gender-based violence, which traditionally focuses on violence against women and girls. Dr Capaldi sets out solutions framed around broadening the conceptualisation of gender-based violence.

Author Biography

Mark Capaldi has extensive experience working with child-led organizations, focusing on child migration, trafficking, street children, working children, and child protection in conflict zones. His work spans South and East Asia, where he spent 30 years collaborating with Concern Worldwide, PACT Inc., Save the Children UK, and ECPAT International. As Deputy Director of ECPAT International (2001-2011) and later as ECPAT's global Head of Research and Policy (2011-2018), he played a significant role in combating the sexual exploitation of children. Currently, Mark holds a doctorate degree and works as a lecturer at Mahidol University's Institute of Human Rights and Peace Studies in Bangkok.



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