

Using Research in Your Work

Addressing barriers for boys accessing care for sexual violence

About this Brief

This brief is based on an article published in the [Special Issue of Child Abuse and Neglect - Global Insights on the Sexual Exploitation of Boys](#). In this issue you can find a systematic scoping literature review, and six empirical studies, which portray survivor narratives, and insights from service providers. The research highlights the impact of gender norms, describes risk factors, and emphasizes the need for trauma-informed care. The goal of the Special Issue was to raise awareness and enhance responses to the sexual exploitation of boys. If the brief increases your curiosity, it is recommended that you read the full article available in [Child Abuse and Neglect](#).

This brief describes data from the article "[Which groups are most affected by sexual violence? A disaggregated analysis by sex, age, and HIV status of adolescents living in South Africa](#)" by Nontokozo Langwenya, Elona Toska, Heidi Stöckl, Lucie Cluver. Citations are not used; however, all findings and conclusions are drawn from this article.

Understanding how young people are affected by sexual violence requires robust, sex-disaggregated, empirical data on different forms of sexual violence. By 2050, it is estimated that 282 million adolescents and young people, boys and girls, ages 10-24, will live in Eastern and Southern Africa and account for nearly 26% of the region's total population. While this bulging demographic offers great potential for future generations, currently, young people continue to encounter significant sexual and reproductive health and rights challenges that threaten their wellbeing. This paper presented data from a 4-year longitudinal study to investigate the nature and extent of sexual violence exposure during adolescence for both boys and girls in South Africa.

Between March 2014 and September 2015, we recruited 1,447 adolescents in the Eastern Cape Province of South Africa into a prospective cohort study: 47% were boys, 71% were living with HIV, and the median age was 13 years. Participants were followed twice between 2016 and 2018, with 94% retention across all two follow-up interviews. At each visit, participants reported if they had ever experienced three forms of sexual violence: non-contact (unwanted showing of private parts), contact (coerced sexual debut, attempted and completed forced penetrative or oral sex,) and transactional exploitation (sex in exchange for goods/money).

The paper reports disaggregated estimates, by age and HIV status, of these three forms of sexual violence for boys and girls.

1. Boys Reported Transactional Sexual Exploitation

Boys reported transactional sexual exploitation, with an estimated 12% of boys reporting transactional sexual exploitation in their lifetime. Transactional sexual exploitation was the most common form of sexual violence, with over one in six adolescents overall ever-experiencing this form of sexual violence.

The likelihood of reporting transactional sexual exploitation in the study increased significantly with age, with one in five adolescents ages 15 and older being exposed to transactional sexual exploitation. Among adolescents ages 10-14, less than 2% had experienced transactional sexual exploitation.

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- As a society, it is important we recognise that boys experience transactional sexual exploitation. This form of sex is exploitative since it consists of abuse of an adolescent's vulnerability, lack of resources, trust, and limited power by the offender.
- When discussing transactional sex with adolescents, which includes its nuance, complexity and motivation, these conversations must consider the experiences of boys.
- Systemic influences affect transactional sexual exploitation of both boys and girls, such as economic and socio-cultural factors. Understanding the system drivers of your adolescent clients is crucial to supporting the sexual and reproductive health and rights of all adolescents.
- Although not investigated in our study, factors such as exposure to poverty and deprivation (transactional sex for basic needs) or desire for improved social status (trading sex for material goods associated with a perceived "higher" social standing) are associated with increased risk of experiencing transactional sexual exploitation.
- While the data supports the continued prioritisation of girls in interventions addressing transactional sexual exploitation, boys ought to also be included in interventions.

2. Adolescent Boys and Girls Are Equally Likely to Experience Non-Contact Forms of Sexual Violence

Adolescent boys and girls are equally likely to experience non-contact forms of sexual violence. About 5.7% of adolescents reported that someone had forced them to look at their private parts when they did not want to and/or someone wanted to look at their private parts when they did not want them to. Prevalence in the sample was 6.5% for girls and 4.6% for boys. difference in reporting by age group: those between 10-14 years compared to those 15+.

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- These important results illustrate that both boys and girls face equal risk of this form of non-contact sexual violence.
- Although not investigated in our study, understanding contextual factors related to non-contact sexual violence will help practitioners to tailor support, and potentially intervene to prevent escalation or continued exposure (Is the offender a family member, or peer? Did this take place at home, school? Etc.)

3. Adolescents Who Had Recently Acquired HIV Were Twice as Likely to Experience Sexual Violence Compared to Adolescents Who Perinatally Acquired HIV

Though levels of sexual violence were comparable between individuals living with HIV and those who were uninfected, adolescents who had recently acquired HIV were twice as likely to experience sexual violence compared to adolescents who perinatally acquired HIV (42.3% compared to 15.7%). This observation was seen even when accounting for the age of adolescents and whether they had experienced sexual violence by the start of the study.

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- There is an intersection of HIV and sexual violence, including among boys. Those who have recently acquired HIV are more likely to have ever experienced sexual violence.
- Although this relationship is correlational, thus we do not know which occurred first, it emphasises the need for practitioners to screen for sexual violence at the time of HIV diagnosis, and during subsequent HIV care visits.
- HIV care services should have strong linkages to sexual violence response services.
- Youth (and both boy and girl-friendly) services, where adolescents are respected, their records are kept confidential, and they are treated with kindness can increase the likelihood of disclosure. at home, school? Etc.)

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Summary

The study results offer insights into the different forms of sexual violence experienced by adolescent boys (and girls) and identifies ways that risks may differ by age-group and HIV status. The study demonstrates that boys and adolescents who have recently acquired HIV – are also at risk of experiencing sexual violence.

Particularly, this data shows that adolescent boys also experience transactional sexual exploitation at higher rates than the public and practitioners generally expect. Violence prevention research should examine who perpetrates violence against boys, especially with non-contact rates being the same rate as contact forms. Explored vulnerabilities of adolescents should extend beyond violence and include livelihood components.