Study On Sexual Violence
Affecting Boys In Zimbabwe

Farm Orphan Support Trust of Zimbabwe (PVO 3/97)

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Executive Summary

Blessing Mutama, FOST Director

Farm Orphans Support Trust (FOST) PVO 3/97, in collaboration with the Department of Social Development (representing the government of Zimbabwe) and three CSOs, namely the Zimbabwe National Council on the Welfare of Children (ZNCWC), Family Support Trust and Simukai Child Protection Programme, commissioned a contextually relevant study on sexual violence against boys in Zimbabwe to inform the development of programme interventions aimed at addressing the growing concern around sexual violence against boys. The purpose of the study was to enhance an in-depth understanding of: the nature, causes and drivers of sexual abuse and sexual exploitation of boys; how social norms around gender shape and influence the sexual abuse of boys; and the nature and adequacy of support available for boys who are victims of sexual violence, including what is already being done to ensure that these boys grow up in a permanent, safe and caring family or in quality alternative care where needed. The study was commissioned amid growing realisation that the extent of sexual violence against boys is likely underestimated across countries in general and in Zimbabwe in particular. Gender norms and masculinities prevent men and boys from reporting their experiences of sexual violence because of the stigma associated with it. There is also a growing realisation that service provision for boys who are victims of sexual violence is not adequately addressing their needs as not much is known about the social dynamics associated with this abuse. It is likely that unless contextual drivers of sexual violence against boys are understood, nascent prevention efforts will fail. Despite a wealth of research about sexuality, masculinity, domestic violence, gender inequities and related topics in several countries, concepts of masculinity and sexuality, the changing patterns of gender roles and the nature of violence are still only partly understood. The knowledge gaps that still exist on sexual violence against boys warranted an in-depth study to understand and appreciate the social dynamics around this phenomenon. FOST has undertaken this initiative to contribute towards creating a body of knowledge on sexual violence affecting boys in Zimbabwe.

The study was a qualitative study aimed at in-depth understanding of contextual factors leading to sexual violence against boys in Zimbabwe. Data was collected through review of literature; key informant interviews with key stakeholders in the child protection sector; focus group discussions with caregivers and parents of young boys in the general population and with boys and girls in the general population; in-depth individual interviews with caregivers and parents of boys that had experienced sexual violence and with the boys themselves that had experienced sexual violence. For the caregivers and boys that had experienced sexual violence, a precondition for participating in the study was passing a risk assessment and having gone through professional counselling sessions after the sexual violence incident. The study protocol was approved by the Medical Research Council of Zimbabwe (MRCZ) before the data collection process commenced in the sampled districts. The research team was trained on research ethics to ensure that they applied ethical principles of confidentiality, informed consent and assent, 'do no harm' and respect, among other ethical considerations. The study was conducted in Bindura, Harare and Mutare districts.

Key findings indicate general under-reporting of sexual violence against boys in Zimbabwe: stakeholders and communities that participated in the study all concurred that the phenomenon is prevalent in the three districts that the study focused on. In Zimbabwe, the Violence against Children Survey (Ministry of Health and Childcare 2017, p.5) showed that about 0.3 per cent of males aged 13-17 had experienced sexual violence in the past year.

Abbreviations

CSO	Civil society organisation
FGD	Focus group discussion
FOST	Farm Orphans Support Trust of Zimbabwe
FST	Family Support Trust
IIs	In-depth interviews
KIIs	Key informant interview
MRCZ	Medical Research Council of Zimbabwe
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
STI	Sexually transmitted infection
ToR	Terms of reference
UNCRC	UN Convention on the Rights of the Child
UNICEF	United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund
VAC	Violence against children
WHO	World Health Organization
ZNCWC	Zimbabwe National Council on the Welfare of Children
ZRP	Zimbabwe Republic Police

1. Introduction

1.1 Background and Justification

Farm Orphans Support Trust of Zimbabwe (FOST) PVO 3/97 is a member of Family for Every Child, a member-led global alliance. Among international development partners, including members of the Family for Every Child alliance, there has been growing recognition and concern regarding the hidden nature of sexual violence affecting boys as most of the response focus has been on sexual and gender-based violence against women and girls. Childline (2015) estimated that approximately two in five boys (40 per cent) of the world's children are victims of sexual abuse. In Africa, the World Health Organization estimated in 2010 that 8.6 million boys under the age of 18 years had experienced some form of sexual abuse involving physical contact (World Health Organization 2010, p.16).

A group of Family for Every Child member organisations met in the Philippines in February 2017 for a practice exchange on child sexual abuse. Their purpose was to gain a better understanding of how social norms around gender influence care for boys affected by sexual violence, and what is already being done to ensure that boys affected by sexual violence grow up in a permanent, safe and caring family. The first stage was to develop and publish a global scoping study entitled 'Caring for Boys Affected by Sexual Violence' (De Sas Kropiwnicki Gruber, Tuggey and Jones 2018). The study came up with a number of conclusions and recommendations. Among the key recommendations was the need for further research to have an in-depth understanding of the dynamics around sexual abuse of boys. While the study highlighted some of the key drivers of sexual violence, alliance members noted that there was a need to think critically about why some boys are more at risk than others, and about the varied ways that boys with different characteristics, and living in different situations and contexts, will experience and be affected by sexual violence. It was evident that more research needs to be done to consider the highly contextual and situational interaction of risk and resilience factors in the lives of boys and how this affects their protection from or vulnerability to sexual violence. The global desk research recommended conducting in-depth, participatory primary research that engages with ecological and intersectional theoretical frameworks to recognise these differences and identify the care, treatment and support needs of boys who are vulnerable to, or affected by, sexual violence. Such research would help to develop a more nuanced understanding of how culture and context influences sexual violence affecting boys across different countries. Following the recommendations, several alliance members commissioned the primary research through a collective approach to the research design to enable action-oriented primary research to meet the needs of each country's local contexts. So far, members in Cambodia, India, Nepal, Philippines, South Africa and Zimbabwe have completed the research.

In Zimbabwe, the extent and nature of sexual violence against boys and men is little known as no in-depth study has been done focusing on men and boys. Most of the studies on sexual violence have mainly focused on women and girls with little focus on men and boys. However, the National Baseline Survey on the Life Experiences of Adolescents (ZIMSTAT, UNICEF and CCORE 2013) concluded that one in ten males aged 18 to 24 years reported experiencing sexual violence in childhood in Zimbabwe.

It is in light of the findings of the above global desk study by the Family for Every Child Alliance, coupled with the dearth of literature on sexual violence against boys in Zimbabwe, that FOST in collaboration with the Department of Social Development (representing the government of Zimbabwe) and two CSOs, namely Family Support Trust and Simukai Child Protection Programme, commissioned a contextually relevant study on sexual violence against boys in Zimbabwe to inform the development of programme interventions aimed at addressing the growing concern around sexual violence against boys. The purpose of this study was to enhance an in-depth understanding of: the nature, causes and drivers of sexual abuse and sexual exploitation of boys; how social norms around gender shape and influence the sexual abuse of boys; the nature and adequacy of support available for boys who are victims of sexual violence, including what is already being done to ensure that these boys grow up in a permanent, safe and caring family or quality alternative care where needed.

The study also sought to answer the following questions:

1. What does it mean to be a male child and what are their lived experiences in the context of sexuality and masculinities?
2. How are masculinity and sexuality socially constructed?
3. How do boys and those around them perceive masculinity and sexuality and how does this impact them?
4. What are the links between the dominant notions of sexuality and masculinity and sexual abuse of boys?
5. What promising or best practice interventions exist?
6. What challenges were encountered and how were they resolved?

The study objectives were in alignment with FOST's mission as a registered Private Voluntary Organisation (PVO 03/97). Since its inception in 1997, FOST has been soliciting and facilitating support for orphans and vulnerable children in Zimbabwe. FOST's programmes are based on the belief that orphaned children have the best opportunity for development within a family environment, without sibling separation, in an environment that is familiar and where they have the opportunity to learn their culture first-hand. This study tackled the need to have sufficient context and culturally-based understanding of sexual violence affecting boys, as victims of sexual violence, as well as generating information on appropriate interventions in Zimbabwe.

It is significant to note that the extent of sexual violence against boys and men is likely underestimated across countries. Gender norms and masculinities prevent men and boys from reporting their experiences of sexual violence because of the stigma associated with it. This makes it very difficult to accurately assess the nature and scope of sexual violence against men and boys (Russell 2007). As Chitsike (2013) noted, this stigma is worsened by the perception that a man who is raped is either a homosexual or will become a homosexual as a result of the rape. In Zimbabwe, as in many other countries, same-sex relationships are illegal. Communities commonly regard it as taboo for boys and girls to engage in same-sex relationships, and local customs, traditional beliefs and local religion do not condone such relationships. The result is that male victims of sexualised violence suffer, not just from the physical injuries inflicted on them, but also from an extreme sense of humiliation and isolation (ibid). Because of the immense stigma associated with rape generally, and in particular the shame, stigma and deep sense of humiliation that male victims of sexual assault face, men and boys will often not even speak of the rape,

preferring to talk only of other assaults that are more acceptable and that will not result in them being ostracised from their wives, families and communities.

It is also worth noting that cases of sexual violence against boys will not get reported or responded to if services are not sensitive to the fact that boys can experience sexual violence and that there are differences in the responses that boys and girls need. As a result, more must be understood about the dynamics of the practice and what interventions have worked in order to respond more effectively in this area. It is likely that unless contextual drivers of sexual violence against boys are understood, nascent prevention efforts will fail. Despite a wealth of research about sexuality, masculinity,[1] domestic violence, gender inequities and related topics in several countries, concepts of masculinity and sexuality, the changing patterns of gender roles and the nature of violence are still only partly understood. The knowledge gaps that still exist on sexual violence against boys warrant an in-depth study to understand and appreciate the social dynamics around this phenomenon. FOST has undertaken this initiative to contribute towards creating a body of knowledge on sexual violence affecting boys in Zimbabwe.

1.2 Objectives of the Study

The following were the study's objectives:

- To conduct research to identify common and context-specific knowledge on how boys become victims of sexual abuse.
- To identify interventions that have been shown to be effective or to have strong potential for preventing and responding to sexual abuse of boys, including therapeutic approaches to working with children and families.

1.3 Scope of the Assignment

The study on sexual violence against boys in Zimbabwe was conducted in the three districts of Harare, Bindura and Mutare, where FOST is already working with orphans and vulnerable children. The study, which was qualitative by design, was not meant to be nationally representative, but was aimed at providing in-depth insights into social, cultural and gender-related factors influencing sexual abuse of boys and into the effectiveness and relevance of the response mechanisms from service providers in the three targeted districts. Despite being focused on the three districts, insights that emerged from this qualitative study have significant implications around understanding the phenomenon of sexual violence against boys in Zimbabwe, which hitherto had not been accorded adequate research attention.

1 Masculinity is defined as 'possessing qualities or characteristics considered typical of or appropriate to a man', or 'having qualities traditionally ascribed to men, such as strength and boldness (Random House 2021).

1.4 Conceptual Framework

The ecological framework[2] was the key lens through which this research was conceptualised.

Children's experiences are influenced by a range of individual characteristics, by the relationships that they negotiate and participate in, as well as by the socioeconomic and cultural contexts in which they live. The ecological framework is based on evidence that no single factor can explain why some boys are at risk of sexual abuse, while others are more protected. This framework views sexual abuse as the outcome of interaction among many factors at four levels – the individual, the relationship, the community, and the societal.

- At the **individual** level, personal history and biological factors influence how individuals behave and increase their likelihood of becoming a victim of sexual violence. Among these factors are being a victim of child maltreatment, psychological or personality disorders, alcohol and/or substance abuse or having experienced abuse.
- Personal relationships such as those with **family, friends,** intimate partners and peers may influence the risks of becoming a victim. For example, having violent friends may influence whether a young person engages in or becomes a victim of violence.
- **Community** contexts in which social relationships occur, such as schools, neighbourhoods and workplaces, also influence violence. Risk factors here may include the level of unemployment, population density, mobility and the existence of a local drug or gun trade.
- **Societal** factors influence whether violence is encouraged or inhibited. These include economic and social policies that maintain socioeconomic inequalities between people, the availability of weapons, and social and cultural norms such as those around male dominance over women, parental dominance over children and cultural norms that endorse violence as an acceptable method of resolving conflicts.

The ecological framework treats the interaction between factors at the different levels as of the same level of importance as the influence of factors within a single level. For this purpose, the research aimed at exploring three levels among the four levels, focusing on individual, personal relationship and community contexts. In this regard, the research engaged with children, families, community members and professionals to explore factors that lead to sexual abuse of boys.

2 Ecological concepts and principles keep a simultaneous focus on people and their environments and their reciprocal relationships; this applies to work with individuals, families, groups communities, and to policy work. Ecological concepts emphasise the reciprocity of person: environment exchanges, in which each shapes and influences the other over time.

1.5 Definition of Terms

Term	Definition
Victim (of sexual abuse)	For the purposes of this research, a victim is defined as a boy (under 18 years old) who has been forced or persuaded to take part in sexual activities.
Child sexual abuse	'Child sexual abuse is the involvement of a child in sexual activity that he or she does not fully comprehend, is unable to give informed consent to, or for which the child is not developmentally prepared and cannot give consent, or that violates the laws or social taboos of society. Child sexual abuse is evidenced by this activity between a child and an adult or another child who by age or development is in a relationship of responsibility, trust or power, the activity being intended to gratify or satisfy the needs of the other person. This may include but is not limited to: • the inducement or coercion of a child to engage in any unlawful sexual activity; • the exploitative use of a child in prostitution or other unlawful sexual practices; • the exploitative use of children in pornographic performances and materials. (WHO 1999, p.15)
	'Sexual violence' is an umbrella term for sexual abuse, sexual exploitation and harmful sexual behaviour (adopted from the Caring for Boys global desk research).
Child	The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and Zimbabwe's Constitution of 2013 define a child as a person under 18 years.

2. Methodology

2.1 Design

This research was a qualitative study aimed at gathering in-depth information on how boys become victims of sexual abuse; on the nature and forms of sexual violence in boys; as well as on the factors that expose boys to becoming victims of sexual violence. The study sought to identify interventions that have been shown to be effective or to have strong potential for preventing and responding to sexual abuse of boys.

2.2 Sampling of Districts and Study Sites

The study was conducted in the three districts of Harare, Bindura and Mutare. These districts were sampled because FOST and its partners are already working in these districts and plans are underway to implement pilot interventions on sexual violence against boys in these districts. In Harare and Mutare, the study was conducted in urban settings while in Bindura, a rural community was selected to enable both rural and urban dynamics around sexual abuse of boys to be captured.

2.3 Study Population

The study population comprised the following:

- Key stakeholders, professionals and service providers at national, sub-national and community levels involved in supporting child protection initiatives in general and those relating to sexual violence in boys in particular.
- Parents and caregivers of boys in the general population.
- Community leaders – traditional (village heads), religious (pastors, priests) and opinion makers (such as teachers, village health workers etc.).
- Parents and caregivers of boys who are victims of sexual violence including residential and foster carers of adolescent boys who are victims of sexual abuse.
- Boys who are victims of sexual abuse.
- Boys in the general population.
- Boys living on the streets.
- Girls in the general population.

2.4 Data Collection Methods

The research employed mixed methods of data collection, which made triangulation of data feasible. These qualitative data collection methods included: review of literature; key informant interviews (KIIs); focus group discussions (FGDs); and in-depth individual interviews (IIs). The study sought to gather and capture the perspectives of boys, parents/caregivers, stakeholders, service providers and community members on sexual violence against boys. The victims of sexual violence were not asked about their personal experiences of sexual violence to avoid re-traumatising them by triggering past memories of the sexual violence.

2.4.1 Review of literature and documents

A review of relevant literature, policy documents and programme reports on sexual violence was conducted. The purpose of the review was to provide an overview and enhance understanding of key issues related to sexual violence that affect boys in Zimbabwe, including the legislative and policy framework; individual, relationships, family and community factors influencing sexual abuse of boys; key players and related programmes being implemented to provide services to boys who are victims of sexual abuse; and interventions with potential impact in reducing cases of sexual violence against boys. The desk review also looked at international literature on sexual violence against boys to draw lessons on the nature of the sexual violence as well as on interventions implemented to address this phenomenon. The documents were selected through internet-based search engines and only those documents on sexual violence against boys that were peer reviewed and published were considered. In total, only 18 documents were reviewed, indicating a general dearth of literature around sexual violence against boys.

2.4.2 Key informant interviews (KIIs)

KIIs were conducted with national and sub-national stakeholders and service providers. These key informants were selected on the basis of their professional insights into issues around child protection and sexual abuse and by virtue of occupying strategic positions in institutions or organisations supporting child protection interventions in general and sexual violence against boys in particular. A repository of national level key informants was developed through initial consultations with FOST and the Department of Social Development. At both national and district levels, the following key stakeholders were interviewed: Department of Social Development, Ministry of Health and Child Welfare, Ministry of Women's Affairs, Gender and Community Development, Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education, National AIDS Council, Zimbabwe Republic Police (ZRP) Victim Friendly Unit, UNICEF, Family Support Trust (FST) and Judicial Services Commission Courts. A total of 11 key informants were interviewed.

2.4.3 Focus group discussions (FGDs)

FGDs were conducted with the following groups of the study population during the research:

- Parents and caregivers of boys in the general population (including community leaders – traditional, religious and opinion makers such as teachers, village health workers etc).

- Boys in the general population (15-17 years).
- Boys living on the streets (15-17 years).
- Girls in the general population (15-17 years).

The FGDs sought to capture the research participants' perceptions and lived experiences of masculinity and sexuality. The topic on sexual violence was considered too sensitive and participants were not asked to discuss personal experiences but general observations or case studies of what they saw happening in their respective communities. Boys living on the streets were targeted as they were noted to be particularly vulnerable to sexual abuse. These boys are vulnerable due to the conditions they live under, which are characterised by violence, poverty and lack of guardianship. During FGD sessions, participatory methods such as body mapping and problem trees were used to indirectly introduce the topics for discussion and enable the children to identify things that they regard as good about being a boy and the advantages and challenges of masculinities and gender. The participatory exercises were aimed at making the participants feel relaxed and able to discuss issues in an indirect way that would enable them to avoid discussing personal experiences. A total of 11 FGDs were conducted across the three study sites and on average each FGD had nine participants. Two groups ended up with more than 10 participants because more participants than had been mobilised came for the meeting and in line with local etiquette and custom, the excess number could not be turned away and ended up participating in the FGDs. The level of participation was very high and data validity was not affected by the extra numbers. Table 1 below shows the number and types of FGDs conducted across the three districts.

Table 1 Focus group discussions conducted by location

Location	FGD	Number of participants	Age range
Bindura	Girls in general population	10	15-17
	Boys in general population	9	15-17
	Parents and caregivers of boys in the general population	10	18 years and above
Harare	Boys in general population	14	15-17
	Boys living on the streets	10	15-17
	Girls in general population	10	15-17
	Parents and caregivers of boys in the general populationW	10	18 years and above
Mutare	Girls in general population	5	15-17
	Boys living on the streets	9	15-17
	Parents and caregivers of boys in the general population	10	18 years and above
	Boys in general population	15	15-17
Total		**112**	

2.4.4 In-depth individual interviews (IIs)

One-on-one interviews were conducted with boys who were victims of sexual violence and with parents and caregivers of boys who were victims of sexual violence. The victims and their caregivers were not asked any questions about their personal experiences of sexual violence in order not to evoke memories of and emotions regarding the trauma, but were asked to discuss general questions about sexuality and masculinities and about the circumstances that usually result in sexual violence against boys, similar to those that boys and parents from the general population discussed. The participants were identified with the assistance of service providers that were already working with sexually violated boys in the respective districts and they were selected from only those that had gone through a counselling process after the sexual violation. Further, a risk assessment was conducted by the Department of Social Development on each participant to ensure that each was psychologically and emotionally counselled to be able to participate in the interviews. Those that failed the risk assessment were not included in the sample.

The rationale for engaging victims of sexual violence and their caregivers on a one-on-one basis was premised on the fact that victims of sexual violence are more open to discussing sensitive issues regarding their perceptions of sexual violence in a private and confidential one-on-one situation than they would be within a group setting, given their previous experiences. The IIs allowed the researchers to collect very detailed information about particular individuals, including their lived experiences of masculinities and the causes and effects of their situations. As indicated in Table 2 below, a total of 24 individual interviews were conducted, comprising 12 interviews with victims and another 12 interviews with their caregivers.

Table 2 Individual interviews conducted by location

Location	Individual interviews
Bindura	Caregiver of victim of sexual violence x 2
	Victim of sexual violence x 2
Harare	Victim of sexual violence x 6
	Caregiver of victim of sexual violence x 6
Mutare	Victim of sexual violence x 4
	Caregiver of victim of sexual violence x 4
Total	**24**

2.5 Data management and analysis

The study gathered mostly qualitative data from desk review, KIIs, FGDs and IIs. Where consent was granted, qualitative data collected during the research was audio recorded by the research team and then transcribed verbatim in the language in which the interview was conducted and later on translated into English. The data was then reviewed and coded into themes around each research question. After the coding, data under each code or thematic area was then analysed using the content analysis method. Content analysis identified the most common responses to questions under each thematic area, identifying data or patterns that can answer research

questions, and finding areas that can be explored further. The data was further analysed to establish relationships between the data, common trends and emerging issues, diversity of perception or experience, similarities or differences among the focus groups and opinions or positions that appear to be outliers. Meaningful conclusions were then drawn from the analysed qualitative data.

2.6 Data quality assurance measures

By employing mixed methods and gathering data from different data sources, the study findings were triangulated for consistency, validity and reliability. Triangulation is a process for comparing, contrasting, verifying and substantiating various views and perspectives on information. Mixed methods seek to overcome the bias that comes from single informants, single methods, single observer or single theory studies. Data gathered using one method was compared and triangulated with that collected through another method as a data quality assurance measure. As part of the data quality assurance measures taken during the study, the research assistants (data collectors) were comprehensively trained and the methodology and the data collection tools were pre-tested before the beginning of the field data collection exercise. Furthermore, the team leader also conducted routine quality checks during the data collection process for completeness and consistency.

2.7 Ethical considerations

Ethical approval

The study protocol was approved by the Medical Research Council of Zimbabwe (MRCZ) before the data collection process commenced in the sampled districts. The research team was trained on research ethics to ensure that they applied ethical principles of confidentiality, informed consent and assent, 'do no harm' and respect, among other ethical considerations.

Selection and risk assessment

The boys that were victims of sexual violence were identified through the Department of Social Development and service providers in the targeted districts who were already working with the boys. Each boy and his guardian then went through a risk assessment process carried out by the research team and the Department of Social Development to determine if both were psychologically prepared to participate in the study given their past experiences. Only after passing a risk assessment were the boys and their guardians engaged to participate in the study. An official from the Department of Social Development was also on standby to provide counselling and referral services in the event that a participant broke down during the interviews or FGDs.

Informed consent

Written informed consent was obtained from each participant if above 18 years and, if below 18, consent from the parent/guardian was obtained, after which an assent was obtained from the child. For those children living on the streets whose parents could not be tracked, consent was obtained either from the Department of Social Development or a CSO partner already working with the children before assent was obtained from the children themselves. Participants were given the opportunity to ask questions until they fully understood the study and the implications of their participation. They were assured of confidentiality and the right to withdraw from the study at any time during the interview or FGD. Confidentiality was maintained by avoiding names and other identifiers.

Participant reimbursement

Participants were not compensated for their time and their involvement in the study. However, refreshments were offered according to MRCZ requirements to those participants taking part in FGDs and individual interviews. Participants were also reimbursed the transport costs that they incurred in order to participate in the research.

Confidentiality and anonymity

All names and personal circumstances which could lead to the identification of research participants were modified in data transcriptions and respondents were identified through a unique identifying number only. Except for FGDs, all interviews were conducted in private. All data for the research was secured in a password-locked safe and on password-locked computers.

Participant withdrawal

Participants were informed that they were free to withdraw from the study at any stage and for any reason.

2.8 Study Limitations

The main study limitation was the limited number of service providers that were working with boys that have been subjected to sexual violence. Most of the focus has been on women and girls and hence it was difficult to identify boys that are victims of sexual violence. Although the victims of sexual violence that participated in the study had gone through counselling, there is a possibility that many more boys that have not gone through counselling remain invisible due to negative perceptions of masculinities surrounding sexual abuse of men in general and boys in particular. Data limitations from service providers also affected access to information on the sexual abuse of boys.

3. Study Findings

In this section, the major findings of the study are presented and discussed. The section synthesises data collected through review of literature, key informant interviews, focus group discussions and one-on-one in-depth interviews conducted with the victims of sexual violence and with their parents or caregivers.

3.1 Sexual Violence Against Boys: Legal Framework

In Zimbabwe, the laws with respect to the substantive, procedural and evidentiary aspects of sexual violence, such as rape, indecent assault and sodomy, are enshrined in part III of the Criminal Law (Codification and Reform) Act under sections 65, 66 and 73 regarding sexual crimes and crimes against morality, which define rape, aggravated indecent assault and sodomy respectively. All same-sex relationships between men are currently illegal in Zimbabwe, as is sex between men, even if fully consensual and between adults.

Rape

Section 65 of the Criminal Law (Codification and Reform) Act (2016) defines rape as: 'If a male person knowingly has sexual intercourse or anal sexual intercourse with a female person and, at the time of the intercourse (a) the female person has not consented to it; and (b) he knows that she has not consented to it or realises that there is a real risk or possibility that she may not have consented to it; he shall be guilty of rape and liable to imprisonment for life or any definite period of imprisonment.'

Aggravated indecent assault

As opposed to the criminal codification act on rape, the offence of aggravated indecent assault clarifies that women and men can be victims of sexual assault and that both male and female perpetrators of the offence can be charged. Precisely, Section 66 of Part III of the Criminal Law (Codification and Reform) Act in Zimbabwe defines aggravated indecent assault in the context of both male and females as both victims and perpetrators of the offence. The first scenario of aggravated indecent assault states that: 'any person who, being a male person (i) commits upon a female person any act, other than sexual intercourse or anal sexual intercourse, involving the penetration of any part of the female person's body or of his own body; or (ii) commits upon a male person anal sexual intercourse or any other act involving the penetration of any part of the other male person's body or of his own body, with indecent intent and knowing that the other person has not consented to it or realising that there is a real risk or possibility that the other person may not have consented to it, shall be guilty of aggravated indecent assault and liable to the same penalty as is provided for rape'. The second scenario, which relates to aggravated indecent assault, stipulates that: 'any person who, being a female person (i) has sexual intercourse with or commits upon a male person any other act involving the penetration of any part of the male person's body or of her own body; or (ii) commits upon a female person any act involving the penetration of any part of the other female person's body or of her own body; with indecent intent and knowing that the other person has not consented to it or realising that there is a real risk or possibility that the other person may not have consented to it, shall be guilty of aggravated indecent assault and liable to the same penalty as is provided for rape'.

Sodomy

Section 73 of the Criminal Law (Codification and Reform) Act characterises sodomy as: '(1) Any male person who, with the consent of another male person, knowingly performs with that other person anal sexual intercourse, or any act involving physical contact other than anal sexual intercourse that would be regarded by a reasonable person to be an indecent act, shall be guilty of sodomy and liable to a fine up to or exceeding level 14 or imprisonment for a period not exceeding one year or both. (2) Subject to subsection (3), both parties to the performance of an act referred to in subsection (1) may be charged with and convicted of sodomy. (3) For the avoidance of doubt it is declared that the competent charge against a male person who performs anal sexual intercourse with or commits an indecent act upon a young male person (a) who is is below the age of twelve years, shall be aggravated indecent assault or indecent assault, as the case may be; or (b) in the case where the victim is of or above the age of twelve years but below the age of sixteen years and without the consent of such young male person, shall be aggravated indecent assault or indecent assault, as the case may be; or (c) who is of or above the age of twelve years but below the age of sixteen years and with the consent of such young male person, shall be performing an indecent act with a young person.'

The penal codes not only make justice for boys who are victims of sexual violence an impossibility, but also actively deter first-instance reporting to police and service providers by victims. The rape laws, in which only girls and women are considered as victims, frequently derive from the perspective that girls and women are the property of men and boys. The Criminal Law (Codification and Reform) Act on rape in Zimbabwe, in which only males are recognised as potential perpetrators, rests on essential notions of male aggression and female submissiveness. Furthermore, the criminalisation of same-sex acts, as described under sodomy offences in section 73 of the Criminal Law (Codification and Reform) Act, which fails to distinguish between consensual and non-consensual acts, and which has a serious chilling effect on reporting, itself rests on outdated binary stereotypes about 'real men' who can withstand any attack, and who therefore, if they were involved in a same-sex act, 'must have wanted it'.

3.2 Prevalence of Sexual Violence Against Boys

Sexual violence against boys is an emerging problem that has largely been neglected in research, although awareness is growing. Previous research on male sexual assault has often focused on specific forms of sexual violence, such as child sexual abuse (Alaggia and Millington 2008; Dube, Anda, Whitfield, Brown, Felitti, Dong and Giles 2005; Fergusson, Horwood and Lynskey 1996) or sexual assault in institutional settings (Scarce 1997; Wooden and Parker 1982) and in areas of armed conflict (Sivakumaran 2007). Interviews with key informants, boys who are victims of sexual violence and their guardians showed that rape and other forms of sexual coercion directed against boys take place in a variety of settings, including in the home, in schools, on the streets and in churches as well as in prisons and police custody. However, despite evidence of the existence of sexual violence against boys and its profound impact on the physical and mental health of the boy child, it is difficult to establish the extent of this problem because of limited research focus on this phenomenon as most of the focus has been on sexual violence against women and girls.

Measuring the magnitude of sexual violence against boys is fraught with methodological challenges. Due to under-reporting, figures obtained are estimates at best. Available estimates from surveys and other data sources vary from study to study, are sampled from different types of populations and differ greatly according to data collection methods. These types of differences across research studies and other investigations into sexual violence against boys constitute one of the primary challenges in measuring levels of sexual violence perpetrated against boys (Potts, Myer and Roberts 2011; Lawry, Reis, Kisielewski and Asher 2011). To date, reliable and comparable cross-country data on the prevalence of sexual violence against boys does not exist. Many practitioners do not view measuring magnitude as a priority for research and oppose the investment of scarce resources in this question.

Over the past several years in Africa, sexual violence against boys has been reported in six conflict countries, namely the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), the Central African Republic (CAR), Liberia, Sierra Leone, Sudan, and Uganda. Data from the DRC suggests that boys comprise at least 4 to 10 per cent of the total number of victims of sexual violence who seek medical treatment (Gettleman 2009; McGreal 2007). Studies conducted mostly in developed countries indicated that 5 to 10 per cent of men report a history of childhood sexual abuse. These statistics point to incidences of sexual violence against boys that went unreported back during their boyhood era. In a few population-based studies conducted with adolescents in developing countries, the percentage of males reporting ever having been the victim of a sexual assault ranges from 3.6 per cent in Namibia to 13.4 per cent in the United Republic of Tanzania and 20 per cent in Peru (ibid). Studies from both industrialised and developing countries also show that sexual violence against boys is not rare (ibid). Unfortunately, there are few reliable statistics on the prevalence of sexual violence against boys perpetrated in settings such as schools, homes, streets, churches and prisons. Most experts believe that official statistics vastly under-represent the extent of sexual violence in boy victims (ibid). The evidence available suggests that boys may be even less likely than girls to report an assault to the authorities. There are a variety of reasons why sexual violence in boys is under-reported, including shame, guilt and the fear of not being believed or of being denounced for what has occurred. Myths and strong prejudices surrounding male sexuality also prevent boys from coming forward (De Sas Kropiwnicki Gruber et al. 2018).

In Zimbabwe, the Violence against Children Survey (VACS) showed that about 0.3 per cent of males aged 13-17 experienced sexual violence. The survey further revealed that less than 1 per cent of males (aged 18–24 years) have experienced sexual touching (0.2 per cent) and unwanted attempted sex (0.4 per cent) and none of them experienced pressured or physical forced sex 12 months prior to the survey (Ministry of Health and Child Care 2017, p.38). The VACS survey results show that no male children experienced forced sex, in contrast to this qualitative study which identified a number of boys that had been sexually violated. The differences in results could be a result of methodological approaches, with the VACS being a survey while this study is qualitative and employed purposive sampling of communities where sexual violence against boys is known to have occurred.

Many key informants interviewed during this study, as well as boys that participated in the FGDs, felt that sexual violence against boys is under-reported because of a number of factors, among them gender norms and masculinities, fear of being stigmatised and not being believed when one reports an incident of sexual abuse and lack of support services for sexually abused boys. During a FGD with boys, one of the participants made the following contribution regarding the prevalence and nature of sexual abuse of boys, with fellow participants supporting his opinion.

> **"Sexual abuse of boys is rife within our communities and if we were to be honest here, most of us have been sexually abused in one form or the other, but none reported. The reason why we don't report is that once you report, your parents might actually start blaming you, arguing that 'Are you not a man, how can you be treated as if you are a girl, learn to be strong.' If you tell your friends or other relatives, you will become a laughing stock among your peers and some might even label you a homosexual. Some might not even believe you and will therefore not be willing to help you. We have seen NGOs that help girls that are sexually abused, but we have not seen those that help boys in the same situation. We have no one who listens to us and so what is the point of reporting the case? To get even, the abused boys end up abusing the next boy."** (Participant in a FGD with boys living on the streets)

Given the social dynamics around sexual abuse of boys, it is difficult to establish the extent of the problem in Zimbabwe. This is compounded by the fact that there has been limited research focus on sexual abuse of boys as the attention has mostly been on women and girls. The boys expressed frustration at the lack of protection from abuse, because of the general attitude and belief from service providers that sexual violence mostly occurs to girls. The boys noted that some of the boys, once abused, will eventually also abuse other younger boys, arguing that because they were abused, they also need to sexually abuse someone. The boys agreed that the abuse of smaller boys by bigger boys has become a form of a ritual for admission into street life.

3.3 Gender Norms and Sexual Violence Against Boys

The study sought to establish how gender norms and masculinities in the three study communities influence sexual violence against boys. The study established that, generally, boys and girls are treated differently as they grow up because of the different gender roles that they are expected to perform by their families and their communities. Boys are regarded as future breadwinners for their families and are therefore generally expected to be tough and resilient in a world in which they have to compete with other men. Boys are therefore not expected to exhibit 'feminine tendencies' such as being weak, emotional and crying. The following are excerpts from interviews and FGDs with study participants.

> **"Uhhh, let's say when boys have done something wrong, the way we scold them or beat them is very much different from the way we treat the girls. The boys are given much harsher punishment than the girls, because they have to learn to be tough and resilient."** (Interview with caregiver)

> **"Real men are associated with respect, responsibility, bravery, [being] hardworking, and self-reliance or being able to stand up for yourself. A real man should be someone who is willing to risk."**
> (Participant in a FGD with boys in the general population)

> **"A man should be brave and confident such that he may even have the guts to get inside the dusty bins, so that he gets food to eat, and live."**
> (Participant in a FGD with boys living on the streets)

The above negative masculinities have at times driven boys towards violent tendencies, including fighting with other boys in school for domination.

While girls are expected to be protected because they are perceived as weak and vulnerable, boys are expected to fight it out to survive. This leads to a perception among parents and caregivers that boys are immune to abusive acts and therefore less attention is paid to their lifestyles and behaviour as it relates to the possibility of sexual abuse. A girl who participated in a FGD in Bindura articulated that:

> **"I think there is a difference between the way boys and girls are treated because the people at home will not really look at how the boy is living his life. For example, if the boy decides not to sleep at home it will be okay with them, but it is not the case when I decide not to sleep at home, so I think there is a difference. When a boy gets home at 12 midnight it is not even a problem, but when a girl gets home at 12 midnight it is a big problem."**
> (Participant in FGD with girls in the general population)

The perception that boys are tougher and stronger makes them viewed less as potential victims of sexual abuse by society. The boys are therefore given leeway to venture into unsafe spaces which the girl child is normally protected from by their parents and the community. For example, a boy child can go into a bar to watch soccer, while the same is not expected of a girl child. By venturing into these unsafe spaces, the boy child becomes more vulnerable to sexual abuse as he can easily be introduced to such challenging behaviours as drug abuse, ultimately leading to sexual abuse, as the following findings show.

FGDs with community members and boys revealed that because society expects boys and young men to eventually become breadwinners for their families, the boys and young men fall under increasing pressure to live this role. As noted by a boy in Bindura:

> **"As young boys we feel pressure to work hard and wish to have our own cars, have a good job and a comfortable life."**
> (Interview with a victim of sexual violence)

Given the high unemployment rate in the country, societal pressure leads some of these boys to venture into livelihood activities where they are vulnerable to sexual exploitation. Parents and guardians who participated in FGDs in Bindura reported that some of the young boys are venturing into artisanal mining, drug dealing and sex work in order to fend for their families.

> **"As society, we expect the boy child to be able to look after the family, including his mother and siblings in the event that the father dies, is disabled or abandons the family. That is why, long back, families would prefer to educate the boy child [rather] than the girl child, because the logic was that the girl child will eventually get married and leave the family while the boy child will look after the family as the breadwinner. This expectation places a heavy burden on the boy child, particularly when the father is not there for one reason or the other. This forces the boy child in some cases to drop out of school and engage in livelihood activities such as gold panning, drugs and sex work."** (Participant in a FGD with parents and guardians)

The livelihood activities that some of these boys pursue are unsafe spaces for young and vulnerable boys. In artisanal mining and drug dealing, young boys are vulnerable to sexual abuse by older men, sometimes in exchange for money and in some cases by force.

> **"When you know that your mother or sisters have nothing to eat at home, you accept to do things that you are ashamed of because you want money. Some of these older men with money will come and persuade you and you give in to their sexual requests because you want money and it also happens when we go for gold panning, the older boys will give you some of their gold in exchange for sex. You are at times drugged and the following day, you would not know what will have happened, but you can tell you will have been abused. All this is caused by poverty."** (Interview with a victim of sexual abuse)

As this quote shows, societal expectations of boys as breadwinners force some to engage in risky livelihood activities that make them vulnerable to sexual abuse and exploitation.

3.4 Masculinities, Sexuality and Sexual Abuse

The study sought to establish how masculinities and sexuality are defined in the three targeted communities and how these definitions and social constructions are linked to sexual abuse of boys in these communities.

Across the three study communities, men are idealised as strong, sexually assertive, heterosexual, dominant, active and in control of their emotions. This perception of an 'ideal man' also applies to boys as they grow up, as described by FGD participants below.

> **"Traditionally, a boy is expected to be sexually assertive and aggressive. He is perceived as a hunter when it comes to sexual relationships while a girl is expected to be conservative and sexually dormant. So it becomes normal for a boy to have several sexual relationships. Such a boy is viewed as 'mancho' and a hero among his peers, while if the same were to happen with a girl she will be vilified by the community as a prostitute, someone not worth marrying."** (Participant in a FGD with caregivers)

FGDs with boys also revealed that boys brag about their sexual exploits among themselves, and a boy who does not have a girlfriend is often derided as a 'sissy', more of a girl than a boy. Across the three communities, a 'real boy' is expected to be in a heterosexual relationship. Key informant interviews and FGDs also noted that in the three communities, it is not expected or acceptable for a boy or a girl to be in a same-sex relationship. The communities actually regarded it as taboo for boys and girls to engage in same-sex relationships as noted by a male caregiver:

> **"Boys are not allowed to date other boys and the same with the girls. It is unheard of, and they say it's a bad omen. There are actually monitors who whenever they hear of such relationships go to the village headmen and write an anonymous letter and the headmen takes that letter to the chief. The offenders will be summoned and then fined with a certain amount of money because they'll be breaking the by-laws. If they are unrepentant, they will be expelled from the community."** (Interview with a male caregiver)

Apart from local customs and traditional beliefs that do not condone same-sex relationships, local religion also disapproves of such relationships.

> **"It is not acceptable for a boy to date another boy, because, even in the biblical scriptures, God told Adam that I am going to give you a helper. So God was not crazy when he created a man and a woman to that effect. So, if we see a boy sleeping with another boy, we will take them to a psychiatrist or maybe we will beat them up because it is not acceptable…"**
> (Participant in a FGD with boys in general population)

Societal conceptualisation of masculinity and sexuality in the three communities has several implications for the sexual abuse of boys in the respective communities. Being a male victim of sexual abuse stands in contrast to hegemonic or conventional norms of masculinity. According to these gender norms, men are expected to seek and actively engage in sexual activity. If they are attacked, they are also expected to be able to defend themselves. Therefore, sexually assaulted men come to be seen as feminised victims and sexual objects: damaged, weak, powerless and helpless in the face of sexual violence. One of the boys, a victim of sexual abuse, though asked not to refer to his personal experience during the discussion, insisted on telling his story so that others could learn from it. He expressed the following feelings:

> **"When I was sexually abused by my coach, it was difficult for me to tell anyone. How could I face people and tell them that I have been made a woman by another man? It's humiliating to be made a woman and I could not even tell my father because I thought he would beat me up for being weak and allowing myself to be abused. Even my friends were going to laugh at me. So I kept quiet and suffered silently, until the perpetrator was eventually caught abusing other boys. That's when I got the courage to come out because I was not the only one who had been abused."** (Interview with a victim of sexual abuse)

Boys who are victims of sexual abuse find it difficult to report it because they are afraid they will be 'feminised' or be considered weak. This is compounded by the fact that the victims are likely to be labelled 'homosexual' and therefore stigmatised and ostracised by their communities as well as their immediate families once the abuse is known. The boys end up self-blaming, leading to them not reporting, and not seeking victim support. Studies elsewhere have shown that sexually assaulted men express greater difficulties in coping with and finding solutions in relation to experiences of sexual assault, and that male victims are more likely than female victims to express anger and hostility and to withdraw from social interaction (Peterson, Voller, Polusny and Murdoch 2011; Tewksbury 2007). Men also run a higher risk of abusing alcohol and other substances as a way of trying to cope with or suppress difficult memories and feelings (Alaggia and Millington 2008; Ratner et al. 2003).

Key informants in the Justice Ministry concurred that sexual abuse cases involving boys rarely surface because of a low rate of reporting.

> **"Mmmm, maybe let me firstly say boys they are different from girls. They don't really disclose as much as the girls do and you can't easily even identify the indicators of abuse in boys because usually sexual violence cases, they often come to light maybe through the teachers, through the neighbours, through the friend or through the police through their tip off and suggestion box system."**
> (Key informant from Ministry of Justice)

Because of awareness, particularly of sexual violence against women and girls, girls are more aware of channels to report sexual abuse compared to boys. The boys are hesitant to use either the family and friends route or the school route because of the stigma associated with male sexual abuse. Communities better understand the sexual abuse of a girl child because the girl child is perceived as vulnerable and needing protection through community structures. A boy participating in a FGD noted the following:

> **"Huh, it is hard to accept because all the abuses that have been happening back then were the women being abused, but the generation is changing because we are now also being abused and for a boy to go and report is hard because it is not acceptable. We will be abused and just keep quiet."**
> (Participant in a FGD with boys in general population).

Service providers such as the police, courts, Ministry of Women Affairs and Ministry of Health, interviewed during the research, all confirmed that they are receiving fewer cases of sexual violence concerning boys compared to girls and they were concerned that this could be a reflection of under-reporting of cases of sexual violence against boys. In Bindura for example, the courts handle an average of 10 cases per year against more than 100 cases of sexual violence against girls. In Mutare, the courts handle on average four cases per year of sexual violence against boys while those against girls are over a hundred.[3] These findings are consistent with literature which showed that very few boys who are victims of sexual violence report their assaults because they think that they will experience negative treatment, be disbelieved or be blamed for the assault. Most victims of sexual violence choose to remain silent out of fear of society's reaction to them despite it being destructive for them to remain silent after the assault.

3 Statistics provided by key informants.

FGDs and in-depth interviews with boys highlighted that some of the sexual abuse of boys was being perpetrated by females who were much older than the victims. These included house maids and well-to-do women who paid the young boys money in exchange for sexual favours. The boys who went through these sexual abuse encounters did not, in most cases, perceive these sexual encounters as abusive because of masculinity notions of male sexual aggressiveness and sexual exploits.

Since gender norms encourage men to seek and engage in sexual activities with women in any situation, sexual violations by female perpetrators may rather be interpreted as sexual experiences. Some of the boys living on the streets in Mutare also described the sexual experiences that they are having with older women as sexual adventures that they believe every boy should go through to become a real man.

> **"These mothers come here, collect us and go with us to their homes. They ask you to thoroughly bath, and sometimes they give you new clothes and you sleep with them. After that they give you money, so what is wrong with that? We actually compete with the other boys to see who is a real man, who manages to have the highest number of these sex queens. We know that they are as old as our mothers but if you are a man and you are offered sex and you refuse, we will laugh at you because you will be a coward."**
> (FGD with boys living on the street)

Overall, notions of masculinity and sexuality influence the way sexual abuse is perceived by boys as well as whether or not the abuse case is reported. Health seeking behaviour after the abuse is also strongly influenced by these notions. It emerged during key informant interviews with service providers that boys in school received sexuality education from their teachers as there is curriculum on sexuality education. The in-school boys are therefore better informed than those that dropped out of school who rely mainly on their peers for information on sexuality.

3.5 Forms of Sexual Abuse

Although sexual violence against boys has become almost synonymous with rape, sexual violence takes a number of different forms. The forms most frequently described in the research literature include: rape or forced sex; sexual harassment and sexual exploitation (including sexual coercion for protection and/or basic necessities such as food). Most of the available literature addresses different forms of sexual violence perpetrated specifically against women and girls. Yet men and boys are rarely included in this body of work.

Sexual violence against boys varies greatly in extent and form across the world. Forms of sexual violence against boys identified across the world include anal and oral rape, genital torture, castration and forced sterilisation, gang rape, sexual slavery and being compelled or forced to rape others. In Sudan for example, reported acts of sexual violence committed against men and boys include anal rape and sexual humiliation (Arche d'Alliance 2004) and the castration of young boys, especially in Darfur (UN-OCHA 2008). Institutionalised sexual violence in boys may occur as part of initiation into a group and may or may not be driven by sexual lust or may be motivated by the need to terrorise a group of people (Weiss 2008).

The study sought to explore the different forms that sexual abuse of boys takes in the three communities targeted by the study. A number of different types of sexual abuse acts against boys were identified through key informant interviews with service providers, in-depth interviews with victims of sexual abuse and FGDs with boys. These acts of abuse included anal rape (sodomy) which is referred to in law as aggravated sexual assault; oral rape; sexual abuse of young boys by older women and men; forced bestiality;[4] incest;[5] and sexual humiliation.[6]

Research participants across the three communities were in agreement that anal rape or sodomy is perhaps the most prevalent form of sexual violence perpetrated against boys. Despite it being criminalised under Section 73 of the Criminal Law (Codification and Reform) Act in Zimbabwe, sodomy is common but difficult to unearth because of social norms and masculinities surrounding the crime. Anal sex or sodomy is associated with homosexuality, which is commonly considered taboo in Zimbabwean society. Anal sex, whether consensual or forced, brings with it great shame, discrimination and ostracism which makes it difficult for male victims of this kind of sexual abuse to report incidences of abuse. Research participants reported that perpetrators of sodomy against boys largely go free because of these societal norms surrounding homosexuality and sodomy.

Boys living on the streets who participated in the study concurred that sodomy is common in urban areas and that it flourishes at night under the cover of darkness. In one FGD, a boy reported that:

> **"There is an Isuzu truck that always comes here and the owner always wants to talk to boys. The man who will be driving it, we don't know what he uses, but usually people don't want to go, but once they do, they start wanting to go with him every day. In fact, ehh, he would have gone to a witch doctor and then he is given medicine so that when he sodomises someone, it's not something that can be seen with the naked eye, you will just be feeling that there is something happening, it's called 'mubobobo' [boys laugh] so the minute you get into that car, ah things will happen to you. Maybe he uses drugs, you will only realise that he did something to you because of the pain you experience in your anus."**
> (Participant in a FGD with boys living on the streets)

Boys living on the streets reported that some of them are lured by older men to go and have anal and oral sex in exchange for money. These men usually come during the night and pick up the boys to go to secluded places where they have paid sex with the boys. Some of the boys involved in sex work are as young as 13 or 14 years.

4 Forced sexual intercourse with an animal such as a goat or chicken.
5 Sexual intercourse with a relative.
6 Sexual acts which can often be perceived as 'demeaning', such as masturbation.

> **"There are several men that visit us during the night. They pick you up and go with you to their homes, hotel or secluded places and ask you to perform oral and anal sex. We used to attack these men whenever they ask one of us to go with them because we knew they were homosexuals, but we realised that some of the boys went behind our backs to have sex with these men because they want money. If you are given a lot of money and you are hungry, you will end up agreeing to these things."**
> (Participant in a FGD with boys living on the streets)

Anal rape was also noted to be occurring in schools, particularly boarding schools, where older boys 'sodomise' 'newcomers' as part of initiation into a new school. FGDs with boys revealed that in most circumstances the boys who sodomise the younger and new boys would have been sodomised previously and they take out revenge on the young and vulnerable boys the following year. The FGDs also highlighted that sodomy of young boys was taking place in churches where priests were sexually abusing them.

> **"Sexual abuse also happens a lot in schools, particularly in boarding schools. Newcomers get abused by bigger boys, who will also have been abused when they were newcomers to the school. So the cycle goes on like that and because they will have been threatened, the abused boys do not report the abuse to the school authorities."**
> (Participant in a FGD with boys in the general population)

The study also revealed that sexual violence against boys entails psychological abuse and verbal abuse. For instance, in a home setting, older females such as housemaids and other female caregivers may put a young boy into a psychological state of wanting to have sex by simply exposing their breasts, thighs or buttocks to young boys. These females may also tease the young boys or outrightly force the boy to have sex with them.

> **"Women who lure boys to have sex with them sometimes verbally provoke these juveniles by simply saying that you are not man enough because you cannot do anything to me. Because of male ego, boys fall into these sex traps just to prove that they are man enough. At times they are forced to have sex. It is difficult to refuse when that older woman who does that is the same person who is taking care of you."** (Participant in a FGD with boys in general population)

> **"For boys, like you were saying, an older woman may be attracted to a boy's physical structure, get the boy into her home and take off her clothes thereby getting the boy sexually excited, and indulge in sex."** (Interview with caregiver)

In some instances, boys reported that some were forced into incestuous sexual relationships with relatives, including their mothers. FGDs with caregivers and boys reported that some older women were having these incestuous sexual relationships because they believed that if they have sex with young boys, they can get cured of illnesses such as AIDS, while others resort to this abuse because they fail to get older men to sexually satisfy them. Living arrangements were also noted to be contributing to this form of sexual abuse.

> **"There are some single mothers who are sleeping with their children. This happens to those children who sleep in the same room with their mothers. So there are times that these mothers feel they want to sleep with a man and then they force the child to have sex with them."**
> (Participant in a FGD with girls in general population)

Forced bestiality was identified as one form of sexual abuse of boys that is more common in rural settings. As part of initiation into a group of boys, particularly herd boys, older boys force young boys to have sex with the animals that they will be looking after while they watch. The boys are forced to sleep with animals such as chickens, goats, dogs and donkeys.

> **"Boys are sometimes forced to sleep with animals such as chickens and goats as a way of being accepted into a group of boys. It usually happens when you are out herding cattle. The older boys will first do it, and they will ask you in turn to do it. If you refuse, they will beat you up, accusing you of wanting to report them to the parents. They know that if you do it, you will not be able to report because you will also be guilty. We know of a recent case here where a boy was forced to sleep with a chicken and he actually did that, but then the chicken died."** (Participant in a FGD with boys in general population)

During FGDs, boys also reported that in some cases young boys are forced to masturbate in front of the other boys to prove that they are now 'men' who can ejaculate and now can be part of the group. This causes humiliation on the part of the young boys.

3.6 Perpetrators of Sexual Violence Against Boys

The study sought to establish who the main perpetrators of sexual violence against boys are. Through KIIs, FGDs and IIs with victims of sexual violence, older men, older women and older boys were identified as the main perpetrators of sexual violence against boys in the three targeted districts.

Male perpetrators

These were identified as mostly older men who pay young boys for anal or oral sex. During FGDs, boys reported that these older men mainly targeted children living on the streets, luring them by giving the young boys money, food, clothes and promises of jobs. Initially these older men will be unknown to the boys, but they create a relationship with the boys gradually through giving the boys tasks such as car washing or guarding until the boys get used to them. Once they create a relationship, they then make their sexual advances.

Among male perpetrators of sexual violence against boys identified through FGDs and KIIs as well as IIs were older men who were known to the boys such as relatives, caregivers, teachers, priests and neighbours. These perpetrators used persuasion, violence and threats in the process of sexually abusing the boys. Those that used persuasion reportedly often established a relationship first with the boys and lured them by offering money, food and entertainment. To win the community and boys' trust, these perpetrators reportedly often presented themselves to the community and the boys they targeted as good-hearted men who were being friendly because of the relationship they had created with the boys. In one of the study areas, one man sexually

abused twelve young boys over a period of six months before he was eventually arrested by the police. KIIs with the police, in-depth interviews with the victims of sexual abuse and their caregivers as well as FGDs with community members noted that the perpetrator would buy sweets for the boys, play football with them and lure them to his house ostensibly to watch movies. It was during these visits to the perpetrator's house that the boys were systematically abused.

An interview with a caregiver of another boy abused by the perpetrator further elaborated what had happened.

> **"When this guy came to live in the neighbourhood, he gave us the impression that he [was] a pre-school teacher looking for a job. He was very good with the children, especially the boys. During weekends, he would spend time with the boys playing soccer and we were actually very happy that at least the boys were finding something to entertain them, something that takes them away from mischief such as alcohol and drugs. The boys also liked him so much. Little did we know that he was a wolf in a sheep's skin. We did not at all suspect anything until I was called to school by my child's teacher. When I got there, the teacher told me that my child was having difficulties sitting on his chair. We took him to clinic and that's when we were informed that the child had been abused in the anus. We asked the child who had done that and initially he refused to say anything, but after much persuasion and assurances that he had not done anything wrong, he named the guy as the perpetrator. He also mentioned that he was not the only one, but there were other boys as well. In total 12 boys had been abused and that is how this guy was eventually arrested."** (Interview with caregiver of sexually abused boy)

Other male perpetrators were identified as relatives, caregivers and priests. These were men known to the boys. Although some used persuasion, some used violence or threats of violence to sexually abuse the boys and silence them. The boys would be threatened that if they ever told anyone, they would be killed or harmed by the perpetrator.

Older boys were also identified as perpetrators of sexual abuse among boys. The sexual abuse occurred either in school or in the village when the boys were herding cattle or playing. None of the boys interviewed had been sexually abused by a stranger or a person they did not know.

Female perpetrators

Female perpetrators of sexual abuse in boys were mainly identified as older women, who lured their victims mainly through persuasion, money or other goodies. Older women tended to use persuasion rather than force. Older women who used money were either known to the boys or they created a relationship with the boys through giving them small paid jobs. Once that relationship had been created the woman would then make sexual advances and later on pay the boy in cash or kind. Some of the boys were picked from the streets while others lived in the same neighbourhood as these older women.

> **"Ah, with the life that we are living now, a woman with loads of money can come, that's maybe their way of life and they give you money. You won't refuse sex with them because maybe you don't have money for food, that's the abuse that we suffer."** (Participant in a FGD with boys living on the streets)

> **"Sometimes when you get a job, maybe as a gardener, at the end, the lady of that house will keep coming to your bedroom giving you funny chores, like go and buy bread, sweep in my bedroom, you are no longer doing the garden, you are now washing sheets and at the end they have sex with you."**
> (Participant in a FGD with boys in general population)

Female relatives and caregivers were also identified as some of the perpetrators of sexual abuse. They would often persuade the boys to have sex with them in exchange for a variety of favours, including goodies and money. Some of the abusers were identified as aunties, house maids, caregivers and even mothers.

Female sex workers were also reported to be luring boys by offering cheap sexual services. Some of the boys would use some of the money that they would have been given as pocket money to engage in sexual activities with the female sex workers as noted during a FGD with boys:

> **"Guys, there are sex workers out there and [they] are living at a certain house in our neighbourhood. It is quite surprising that they start roaming the streets at around 7.30pm and they are charging less for their services. One day I was just walking along the street close to their stronghold [sex workers], I did not have the intention to have sex but I could not resist a cheaper price for their services. I actually paid her the little price that she quoted me and did what I had to do [to have sex with her]. I was shocked upon realising that their charges are very low and affordable even to young boys like me."**
> (Participant in a FGD with boys in general population)

Some of the sex workers were reported by the boys to be much older than them, in their thirties, and thus making their conduct an act of sexual abuse. The boys though generally did not view these harmful sexual behaviours as sexual abuse but sexual experimentation which is encouraged through masculinities. By law, if the boys are less than 16 years and the female sex worker is older, that constitutes sexual abuse.

3.7 Factors Leading To Sexual Violence Against Boys

The research sought to establish the main factors leading to sexual violence against boys in the three targeted communities. Perceptions on these factors were mainly captured from community members, caregivers or parents of boys who were sexually abused, key informants and the sexually abused boys themselves. The research did not have the opportunity to interview perpetrators to gain an understanding of why they committed sexual abuse offences on boys. Several factors were identified as leading to sexual violence against boys.

Masculinity and gender norms

A review of literature on sexual violence against boys showed interesting dimensions regarding factors leading to its occurrence. The literature revealed that sexual violence varies greatly in extent and form across the world. Attempting to understand the circumstances associated with sexual violence against boys and, equally importantly, its absence can help us better respond to and prevent its continued existence (Wood 2006). The literature on the different forms and motivations of sexual violence against boys focuses on social constructions of issues around sexuality and masculinity (Maedl 2011). Masculine gender norms serve as an internalised means by which men view and organise themselves in society (Pedro, Casado and Wade 2009). Masculinity refers to possessing qualities or characteristics considered typical of or appropriate to a man or having qualities traditionally ascribed to men, such as strength and boldness. Traditional masculine ideology depicts males as dominant aggressors and females as vulnerable prey. Social expectations of what it means to be a traditional man in most societies (i.e., strong, tough, self-sufficient and impenetrable) are contradictory to boys' victimisation in general and especially with regard to sexual victimisation (Weiss 2008). Hence, boys may perceive their victimisation to be incompatible with their masculinity and feel they have lost a large part of their identity as future men. Socially constructed notions of gender and sexuality can also provide motivation for perpetrators to commit sexual violence against boys. Additionally, there are reports that boys have been forced to have public sexual intercourse with daughters, mothers, or wives, and were often threatened with death if they refused (Baaz and Stern 2010). Therefore, Wood (2006) recommends more research on gaining a better understanding of the variation in patterns of sexual violence against boys, and what promotes or constrains sexual violence against boys.

Masculinities and social norms prevalent in the three targeted communities have led to: non-reporting of sexual abuse as abused boys fear being feminised and ostracised; and initiation of boys into manhood through sexual abuse acts such as forced bestiality, sodomy and sexual humiliation and sexual intercourse with older women, among other sexual abuse acts that have already been described in the preceding sections of this report.

Poverty

Poverty was identified by key informants, caregivers, community members and the boys themselves as one of the key factors making boys vulnerable to sexual violence. Children in difficult circumstances are often lured into sexual relationships with both older men and women for money, food, clothes and shelter.

> **"I think there is the issue of money because they [perpetrators] will come with money to us and then we as children we will just fall into those situations because we come from poverty-stricken families and we want money."**
> (FGD with boys in general population)

> **"What also happens is that on my side, let's say things are tough and then someone comes with his or her SUV [land cruiser] and money [US dollars] and then I, because I am poor, I see a gap, I know if I agree to be sexually abused then I am better off than before and my things will work."**
> (FGD with boys living on the streets)

Poverty has also led some families to live in crowded accommodation spaces where children and adults sleep in the same room. These living arrangements make children, both boys and girls, vulnerable to sexual abuse as they are easily accessible to sexual predators within the household.

Orphaned and vulnerable children

During FGDs, caregivers and boys reported that young boys also become vulnerable to sexual abuse upon the death of their parents and caregivers. The boys are forced to fend for their siblings and some gravitate to the streets for survival. Some get looked after by caregivers where they are vulnerable because of limited survival options.

> **"Sometimes boys fell victims to sexual violence because they are orphans, and they will not be having anyone to talk to or go to."** (Interview with caregiver)

Service providers interviewed reported that orphaned boys become vulnerable to sexual abuse because they lack the protection of their parents. Some get into kinship care where they are sexually abused and threatened with expulsion from the kinship care arrangement should they report the abuse. As a result, such abused boys suffer in silence.

Some orphaned boys end up looking for employment to support their siblings. In the process of seeking employment, they become vulnerable to sexual predators.

> **"Given that unemployment is an everywhere phenomenon in Zimbabwe, [a] boy might be told to come and get a job, but for him to get the job he will have to sleep [have sex] with the boss either male or female. This is usually referred to as carpet interviewing."** (Interview with caregiver, Mutare)

> **"Imagine if madam boss says 'Let's go to my house and do this and that', do you think I would refuse a chance to go and have fun, food and money [boys laugh] and there that is where the problem is [poverty]."**
> (FGD with boys on the streets, Harare)

Ritual beliefs

Although during the research no interviews were conducted with perpetrators of sexual violence against boys, participants across the three study sites believed that some of the sexual abuse of boys is done because of ritual beliefs. There is a general perception that some of the perpetrators of sexual abuse believed that having sex with a young boy will enable them to acquire riches. Some were thought to believe that having sex with a young boy or girl can cleanse them of HIV infection.

> **"Some traditional healers give bad advice to people that if you sleep with a young boy or young girl that will enable you to get rid of a bad omen that will be afflicting someone. With that belief, these people will go and sexually abuse young boys and girls."** (FGD with boys in general population)

> **"In our local courts you will be amazed to have a perpetrator of sexual violence in boys who is the biological father or mother of the victim and upon being asked why they committed the offence, they would say that they got the advice from traditional healers that if they sleep with their own biological offspring, all their problems will go away, they will have a lot of money or realise a bumper harvest in a cropping season."** (Interview with key informant)

There was also a belief within the communities that some women were harvesting sperm from young boys for ritual purposes. The women used the harvested sperm with traditional medicines to enable these women to get rich quickly.

> **"Some rich women are in the business of selling sperms for ritual purposes and they are sexually abusing boys as they harvest sperms to sell from these young boys. The boys are either made to masturbate or they engage in sex with the older women while their sperms are harvested in a condom."** (FGD with boys living on the streets)

Apart from traditional cleansing rituals articulated above, religious-related rituals were also reported to be leading to sexual abuse of boys in the three communities. Religious leaders and 'prophets' were in some cases exposing young boys to sexual abuse because of their ritual beliefs. Some of the sexual abuse happened during 'healing' sessions where young boys and young girls were asked to do certain rituals which lead to sexual abuse. Participants in FGDs and in-depth individual interviews explained that during these religious rituals, boys and girls as well are ordered to perform certain sexual acts for them to be 'healed'. One boy was reportedly forced to sleep with a healer's wife for the boy to be cured of an ailment that he was suffering from. The boy later reported the incident to his parents leading to the arrest of the 'healer'.

The main factors contributing to sexual abuse of boys were identified as masculinities and social norms, poverty, vulnerability brought about by being orphaned and rituals rooted in traditional and religious beliefs.

3.8 Society's Reactions Towards Sexual Violence Against Boys

The study sought to establish how society is reacting to cases of sexual abuse of boys in the respective communities. Society's reaction or response towards a social challenge, in this case sexual abuse of boys, has significant implications on how the social problem will be addressed and managed. The main finding was that communities generally do not consider sexual abuse of boys to be a serious concern, mainly because of preconceived dominant notions about masculinity and sexuality that portray boys as aggressors and not victims of sexual violence. A key informant in Mutare noted the following:

> **"What I have noticed is that, if it is sexual violence perpetrated against a boy, society's reaction is different. Precisely, people want to understand first how it happened and once they hear that maybe a 16-year-old boy abused a 10-year-old boy, at times they just think 'Ahh, it is just a mischief between boys and they were experimenting.' With street kids, at times the society takes it as 'Ahh, they were high with the "weed" they smoke', but for these issues that happen at home, members of the society start wondering how it happened."**
> (Interview with key informant)

A sense of alarm and urgency is generally lacking within society when there is sexual abuse of boys compared to when there is sexual abuse of girls. Society takes seriously the issue of sexual abuse of girls leading to immediate activation of the community mechanisms for handling a sexual abuse case, which is not the case when sexual abuse of boys occurs. While there is gradual recognition among the communities that sexual abuse of boys is equally as bad as sexual abuse of girls, the mechanisms for response are still weak when it comes to boys. This presents a barrier to the reporting of sexual abuse cases by boys as they feel that society misunderstands them; they are also reluctant to report because there are no adequate support mechanisms for boys who go through a sexual abuse ordeal. In the three communities visited during data collection, there are no institutions adequately prepared to handle boys' sexual abuse cases as most of the focus has been on the girl child.

3.9 Impacts of Sexual Violence Against Boys

The study sought to establish some of the impacts of sexual abuse against boys at individual, family and community levels. Interviews with key informants revealed that the impact of sexual violence on the boys' physical and mental health is often substantial and long-lasting. During interviews with service providers it was reported that boys who are victims of sexual violence can experience a host of psychological effects, including depression, anxiety, low self-esteem, inappropriate sexual behaviour, and issues of social competence, cognitive difficulties, body image concerns, and substance abuse. Boys who are victims of sexual violence may experience a wide range of post-traumatic symptoms including depression and other emotional and physical problems as a result. Common reactions of boys in the aftermath of sexual violence can also include fear of appearing 'feminine,' societal, peer or self-questioning of their sexuality, homophobia, sense of shame, and feelings of denial which might lead to suicide (Carpenter 2006). Some of these reactions were described by one of the study participants:

> **"It hurts the one who is abused so much. If you are not strong, you might think that it is better to end your life because people will look at you and laugh at you as if it's your fault that you were abused. It will take courage to walk down through the community because you know people are pointing fingers at you. At school, it will even be worse as fellow students will be laughing at you. So sometimes it is better to keep quiet about it and suffer in silence."**
> (Interview with a survivor of sexual violence in boys)

During interviews with sexually abused boys, some of them broke down and started crying despite the fact that they had gone through the individual risk assessment and several rounds of professional counselling for over a year, and that the sexual abuse incident had happened more than a year ago. Those that broke down were immediately attended to by a child protection counsellor from the Department of Social Development. The emotional breakdown from some of the boys was an indication that the emotional scars of abuse will take a long time to heal and can contribute to physical, psychological and social challenges for the individual boys.

Interviews with child protection officers in the Department of Social Development indicated that some of the sexually abused boys perform poorly in school and some turn into abusers themselves. Some of the boys would reportedly physically abuse their peers and some ended up sexually abusing other boys as well as girls. Literature also shows that sexually abused men and boys can also suffer physical health challenges such as genital infections, impotence, swollen testicles, blood in stools, abscesses, ruptures of the rectum and HIV infection (Chynoweth 2020). Narrations from some of the sexually abused boys revealed the health challenges that they experienced after the abuse:

> **"After being sexually abused, I thought I was possibly HIV positive and going to die."** (Interview with a sexually abused boy)

> **"After being done [sexually abused] by Mr X, it was difficult for me to sit in a chair at school. It was painful, but I could not tell anyone. When my teacher noticed this, she asked me why I was having difficulties in sitting upright, but I could not tell her. I was taken to hospital where it was revealed that I had some disease. That is when I had the courage to tell them what had happened because I was afraid of contracting AIDS."** (Interview with sexually abused boy)

> **"One of my friends was having a homosexual affair [an abusive one] with this man, who would come to pick him up during the night. After a while, he could not walk properly, and he could defecate without warning, at any time. I think his organ [anus] had become loose and could not control anything. I went with him to the clinic and when we got there and he explained his problem, the attending nurse shouted at him and said, 'This clinic is not for homosexuals, go where you got your problem' and we had to go away. We went to an NGO here in Mutare where he was eventually treated for an STI after some time. It was a painful experience for my friend."**
> (Participant in a FGD with boys living on the streets)

Key informants and caregivers of sexually abused boys, as well as the sexually abused boys themselves, concurred during the study that psychological consequences of sexual violence in boys may also include guilt, anger, anxiety, somatic complaints, sleep disturbances, withdrawal from relationships and attempted suicide. Boys who have been sexually violated may also experience intense and lasting changes in physiological emotion, cognition, arousal, and memory as well as confusion over their sexuality (whether the fact of having been sexually assaulted makes them homosexual or attractive to homosexuals).

Research participants also spoke of the negative effects of sexual violence on the reputation and stability of the victim's family.

> **"What happened is that we had problems in our family so we decided to seek religious help from the prophet's church where our son was subsequently subjected to sexual violence. After the incident, my son was blaming me since I was the one who took him to the prophet. During the first days in the aftermath of the sexual assault, he used to harass me. Fortunately, my older sister then explained to him that she had actually gone there as well and from then onwards my son has since accepted the situation."**
> (Interview with caregiver of a victim of sexual violence in boys)

Caregiver families of victims of sexual abuse narrated how they were ostracised, stigmatised and discriminated against upon the community's realisation that their child is involved in homosexual relationships. In some cases, the communities blamed the families for negligence and for inculcating anti-social values in their children. One caregiver in Harare narrated how her community reacted to the abuse of a boy she was looking after.

> **"My sister asked me to look after her boy because she could not afford to send him to school in the rural areas. So, the boy came to stay with us, and he was just normal like any other boy. We did not suspect that anything was going on, but with time I could sense that even my church friends were not coming to visit me as often as they used to do. I could not understand why. Then one day, one of my friends gathered courage and came to me and said, 'Oh this is what you have chosen for your child, that he becomes a homosexual. We know that things are tough but we did not expect that from you.' I asked her what she was talking about and she revealed to me that my child was having a homosexual affair with a man who lived in the neighbourhood. She even challenged me to go to the man's place at that moment and we went and found my boy there, wrapped in women's clothes. My boy had just turned 14. When we arrived, I think the man smelt something was wrong and he fled and was arrested a week later while he was in hiding. The boy confessed about their relationship and the man was sent to prison. After this incident, my relationship with the community members has never been the same again. I had to send the boy back to the mother because I was afraid he could be attacked in the community. Somehow, the community seems to blame my family for the abuse that the boy went through."** (Interview with a caregiver)

Sexual abuse of boys appears to negatively impact both the boys at personal level as well as the survivor's families. The situation is compounded by the fact that there are very few service providers that cater for the needs of sexually abused boys in the three research sites visited.

3.10 Support For VICTIMS OF Sexual Violence

According to O'Brien (2011), interventions and policy responses to sexual violence against boys need to be based on an understanding of the problem, its causes and the circumstances in which it occurs. In many countries the phenomenon is not adequately addressed in legislation (Light and Monk-Turner 2009). In addition, sexual violence against boys is frequently not treated as an equal offence with that against girls. Many of the considerations relating to support for girls who have been sexually assaulted – such as an understanding of the healing process, the most urgent needs following an assault and the effectiveness of support services – are also relevant for boys. Some countries such as South Africa have progressed in their response to sexual violence in men and boys, providing special telephone hotlines, counselling, support groups and other services for male victims (WHO 2010). In many places, though, such services are either not available or else are very limited. In Zimbabwe, for instance, there are few counsellors on hand who are experienced in discussing problems with boys who are victims of sexual violence. In most countries in general, and Zimbabwe in particular, there is much to be done before the issue of sexual violence against boys can be properly acknowledged and discussed, free of denial or shame. Such a development will enable more comprehensive prevention measures and better support for the victims to be implemented.

Support can be extremely important to victims of sexual assault/abuse and may help or hinder their recovery. Support can come from those immediately around the victim, such as family members and friends, or it can come from professionals such as therapists, doctors, or others. In this study, most victims of sexual abuse and their caregivers felt that they did not have access to an effective support system during and after the abuse, resulting in non-disclosure of the abuse. These sentiments were echoed by many participants and seem to highlight the important role that support services play in the healing process of victims of sexual violence against boys. The majority of the participants stated that having a safe place to talk about the abuse would be incredibly helpful. The comment below reflects the need for such safe places.

> **"Create safe havens where they [victims] can seek shelter, where they can get the help they need and feel safe and protected. Some of us have talked about lack of services for boys who are victims of sexual violence in Zimbabwe. This means more needs to be done, because we see girls being taken care of when they are abused, but we as boys have no one to help us. It's unfair, because it seems as if our being abused does not matter, it is only the abuse of girls that is important."** (Participant in a FGD with boys on the streets)

A key informant in Mutare suggested that there is need for both in school and out of school guidance and counselling programmes for sexual abuse in boys.

> **"Currently, we have a Guidance and Counselling curriculum in schools, but this is primarily focused on abuse related to girls. There is no specific focus on the boy child and I think this is a huge gap."** (Key informant, Ministry of Gender)

The research participants also suggested that the government provide financial aid to victims who may lack financial means to pay for counselling services, in particular in cases where victim services and/or compensation are only available to those who report the crime to the police. Overall, participants called for more male-specific support services in each jurisdiction. All participants understood that sexual assault is a gendered crime and that girls are more likely to be victims of sexual violence than boys and hence the reason why there are more support services and awareness campaigns for girls than for boys. Yet underlying responses to these questions were feelings of unfairness that it is important to:

> **"Make sure government provides funding equally to all organisations that focus on the boy and girl child."** (Participant in a FGD with boys on the streets)

The suggestions provided by participants were thoughtful and based on their own experiences with society's attitudes towards sexual violence in boys and with the criminal justice system as well as with support services.

> **"They [sexually abused boys] just need counselling so that what happened to them should not even affect them or affect their education. I think they just need counselling."** (Participant in a FGD with boys in the general population)

A key informant from the Ministry of Justice added that there is need for more support for boys who experience sexual abuse in the same manner that there is support for sexually abused girls.

> **"They [sexually abused boys] also need early treatment in case the person who did that to him could be having STIs. Victims of sexual violence in boys also need food, shelter and clothing as well as financial assistance to go to school and to soldier on despite their past experiences."**
> (Key informant, Ministry of Justice)

Study participants were asked if they know where to go if a boy suffered sexual abuse. The majority were not sure if there were specific institutions that offer support services to boys who are victims of sexual abuse besides those that are already offering services to the girl child. The Police Victim Friendly Unit was identified as the first port of call for reporting sexual abuse across the three study sites. The police were the preferred first port of call, because of their capacity to offer protection to victims of sexual abuse.

> **"I think issues like these need to be taken to the police, as well as those to do with health, because there are some cases whereby you just go to anyone, but those people are not able to protect the child. So, better to go where the child will be protected, and the whole world will not know what would have happened. They have their own way of doing things."**
> (Interview with caregiver of a boy who is a victim of sexual violence)

There were concerns however that the police are unlikely to take sexual abuse of boys as seriously as they would take sexual abuse of girls. In some instances, the police and the courts system were perceived to be inefficient in handling case of sexual abuse of boys.

> **"With my son [a victim of sexual violence] we went to Bindura, but the documents were missing and money was just being wasted because each time we boarded the bus to Bindura it was to no avail, and we ended up losing all the money we got from part time jobs. So we just got exhausted from the process. At times we would get there and be told to come back later and when we came back the court would still say they hadn't found the papers. We wasted a lot of money on transport and got fed up but these are issues that the court should really address."**
> (Interview with caregiver of a boy who is a victim of sexual violence)

Some of the boys accused the police of being corrupt as they would protect perpetrators after being bribed. Some of the boys felt that it was futile to report their cases to the police as nothing would be done.

> **"If you go to the police, these days ah you lose, that person [perpetrator] would have more money than you and they can just bribe their way out."**
> (Participant in a FGD with boys on the streets)

Other service providers mentioned by participants included community-based Case Care Workers, the Department of Social Development, NGOs and health centres. Churches were also identified as sources of support, particularly in terms of counselling and emotional healing. Key informants and FGDs with boys and victims of sexual violence noted that institutional service providers were inadequately capacitated to handle cases of sexual abuse of boys even though a protocol for dealing with sexual abuse of boys is available.

> **"Yes, there is definitely a procedure for dealing with cases of sexual violence in boys, whereby we say as a ministry we don't work alone but we work with several departments that are advocating against sexual violence in girls and boys, although what I have noticed is that most partners lack that element of sexual violence against boys. Uhm, there is a victim friendly unit whereby we always encourage communities that they should always report any suspected case to the victim friendly unit of the police. As a ministry we do referrals, whereby when a case comes, we refer to the victim friendly unit, where a docket is opened and investigations are done. We also link with the Ministry of Health that looks at the health aspect, HIV and STIs, then we also do counselling because in most cases the child will be traumatised."**
> (Key informant, Ministry of Women Affairs)

Another key informant added that a protocol for dealing with sexual violence against boys exists, but awareness is very low as most of the focus is on the girl child.

> **"Yes, a protocol exists for dealing with issues surrounding sexual violence in boys in our jurisdiction. Considering that in schools they are now teaching about abuse simplifies the procedure for handling sexual violence cases, thanks to the new curriculum, which provided a guidance and counselling sections to that effect. Yes, now there is awareness for the boys but unfortunately in this province [Mashonaland Central] uhh, the means of communication with the public is limited because there is no media, there are no newspapers and no community radio stations. Therefore, the procedure for responding to sexual violence in boys is heavily dependent on the police (ZRP) who are tasked to conduct campaigns in communities or in schools, where they engage the public about sexual violence, and that everyone is a potential victim."** (Key informant, Ministry of Justice).

Overall, support for boys who are sexually abused across the three districts is glaringly lacking as most service providers are focused on the girl child.

4. Key Conclusions

The following are the study's key conclusions.

- **Prevalence of sexual abuse:** the study unearthed evidence of sexual abuse in the three targeted communities. The study noted that there could be significant under-reporting of cases of sexual violence against boys owing to a number of reasons including the following: biased focus on the girl child by institutional service providers; fear of reporting sexual abuse cases by boys and their caregivers because of gender norms and masculinities, stigmatisation and discrimination against sexually abused boys; fear of not being believed; and societal perception that sexual abuse is mainly a concern for the girl child who is perceived to be weak and vulnerable.
- **Legal framework:** although there are extensive legal provisions to protect the girl child from sexual violence, gaps exist when it comes to addressing sexual violence against the boy child.
- **Key factors leading to sexual abuse:** sexual abuse of boys is linked to a number of factors including the following: masculinity and gender norms; poverty; ritual beliefs; vulnerability related to being orphaned and under kinship care; and non-reporting of cases leading to perpetrators escaping without facing justice, thereby increasing the likelihood of repeat offending.
- **Impacts of sexual abuse:** just as in the case of sexual abuse of girls, sexual abuse of boys has several impacts on the boy child and their immediate family. These include health risks such as contracting STIs and HIV; physical damage to the body; mental and psychological trauma; ostracism and discrimination within the family and community context; confusion over sexual identity; suicidal tendencies; and poor performance in school, among other factors.
- **Support for sexual abuse victims:** although there are several service providers for sexually abused girl children, institutional preparedness and capacity to handle sexual abuse of boys is limited. Most service providers are biased towards the girl child, leaving a significant gap for boys that suffer sexual violence.
- **Perpetrators of sexual violence:** these include older men and women who are either known or unknown to the boys, caregivers, other boys, religious leaders and household helpers, among others.

5. Recommendations

A holistic approach to addressing sexual violence against boys is needed in Zimbabwe. To achieve this, the following specific recommendations, based on study findings, are proffered.

- **Research:** the prevalence of sexual violence against boys is largely unknown in the country. There is therefore a need for population-based research to establish the extent to which sexual violence is being perpetrated against boys. This study was a qualitative study, meant to provide an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon, and has established a basis upon which further studies can be premised.
- **Awareness creation:** this is needed to make communities, service providers and institutions tasked with addressing sexual violence alive to the fact that sexual violence against boys exists and should be given the same attention as that accorded to sexual violence against girls. Awareness creation should target: communities to address cultural norms and values that promote negative masculinities that in turn perpetuate sexual violence against boys; service providers who should be prepared and have the capacity to adequately address the needs of boys who are victims of sexual violence in the same manner that they address the needs of girls affected by sexual violence; different groups of boys so that they have an appreciation of what constitutes sexual abuse/violence and are provided with knowledge on where they should go to seek services should they experience sexual violence. IEC materials on sexual violence should acknowledge and define sexual violence in a manner that also includes boys. The awareness campaign could be linked to the United for Boys campaign launched by Family for Every Child.[7]
- **Capacitate service providers:** there is need to improve the capacity of institutions and service providers who support victims of sexual violence through training to enable these institutions and providers to be responsive, so that they adequately understand and meet the needs not only of women and girls, but also of boys and men who are victims of sexual violence. These service providers include the police, justice system, health workers, civil society organisations, social services and other relevant government and non-governmental institutions.
- **Problematic and harmful sexual behaviour:** there is need to support those boys that exhibit problematic and harmful sexual behaviour as this seems to eventually culminate in sexual violence.
- **Policy and legal framework:** lobbying for the review of the policy and legal framework is key to enable policies and legislation related to sexual violence to acknowledge and criminalise sexual violence against men and boys.

7 See https://www.familyforeverychild.org/pages/category/united-for-boys?locale=en

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7. Annexes

For copies of the following documents, please contact FOST (details on back cover).

7.1 Terms of Reference

Sexual Violence in Boys Primary Research

7.2 Data Collection Tools

Interviews Guide for Key Informant
FGD Guide for boys in the general population
FGD Guide for girls in the general population
FGD Guide for Parents or caregivers of boys in general population
In-depth Individual Interview Guide for Boys who have experienced sexual violence
In-depth Individual Interview Guide for Parents or guardians of boys who have experienced sexual abuse

7.3 Consent Forms

Informed Consent Form for Key Informants
Informed Consent Form for Children below the age of 18 years and Parents or Care Givers participating in the study
Informed Consent Form for community members participating in the research

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