

**Forum:** United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF)

**Issue # 2:** Measures for prevention and response to sexual abuse, harassment, and exploitation among children and adolescents

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### **Introduction:**

Children are the most vulnerable resource to our future as a society and to the evolution of our world. The most crucial time of a child's development is their childhood, where their character, passion, and personality are built and constructed. However, this vital stage of their life can be ruined and shattered by the effects and consequences that come of sexual abuse, harassment, and exploitation of children and adolescents. These consequences and effects that come from sexual abuse, harassment, and exploitation can have long-lasting effects which they might endure for the rest of their adult life. According to ResearchGate, these consequences come from different causes, some being poverty/homelessness, lack of education, poor health/mental condition, unemployment, age of parents, and exploitation. The effects of these include fear, self-harm, sexual health, emotional/mental harm, PTSD, and difficulty with relationships in their adult life.

The law recognizes that children and young adolescents are not able to give consent to any type of sexual activity, even if adults have any sexual interaction with a minor and a type of consent is given, it is considered illegal and treated as criminal sexual conduct.

Child Sexual abuse has been treated as a public issue since the 1970s-1980s, it was socially unspeakable, and not much attention was given to the issue before the rise of its public concern in those years. This made legal action become more recurring, starting with the enactment of the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act in 1974, and the National Center for Child Abuse and Neglect. However, the 1980s-1990s came with several laws that sparked greater public awareness of the detention of child sexual abusers.

### **Definition of Key Terms:**

For the majority of these definitions, we will be using UNICEF's definition. This is for us to use the most relevant meaning of the word and with the most correlation to the current issue

- **Minors:** Every human being below the age of eighteen years unless, under the law applicable to the child, majority is attained earlier.
- **Sexual Abuse:** actual or threatened physical intrusion of a sexual nature, whether by force or under unequal or coercive conditions, perpetrated by aid workers against the children and families they serve.

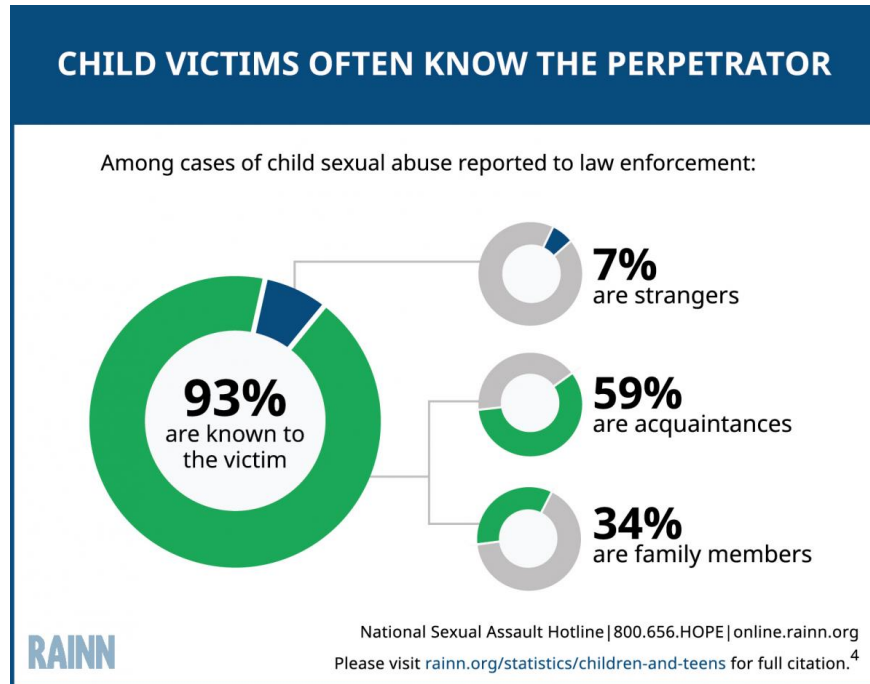
- **Sexual Exploitation:** any actual or attempted abuse of a position of vulnerability, differential power, or trust, for sexual purposes, perpetrated by aid workers against the children and families they serve.
- **Sexual Violence:** the programmatic definition for related misconduct perpetrated by anyone other than aid workers. It occurs in every country, and across all segments of society. A child may be subjected to sexual violence at home, school, or community.
- **Age of consent:** The objective of the minimum age of sexual consent is to protect adolescents from sexual abuse and from the consequences of early sexual activity on their rights and development
- **Child Marriage:** any formal marriage or informal union between a child under the age of 18 and an adult or another child.
- **Female Genital Mutilation:** Il procedures involving partial or total removal of the female external genitalia or another injury to the female genital organs for non-medical reasons.
- **Grooming:** Online grooming is sexual abuse and happens when adults communicate with young people under 18 because they want a sexual relationship. Grooming takes place over time and a perpetrator often starts by building a relationship with a young person to find out about their needs and vulnerabilities.

- **Child Trafficking:** the recruitment, coercion, transportation, transfer, harboring, or receipt of children under the age of 18 for the purpose of exploitation.

## General Overview

### Imbalance of Power

Sexual exploitation abuses the position of vulnerability that a person holds to obtain sexual favors. This exploitation comes from people on who the victim depends. This could be in the form of survival, school, transport, and/or safety to which they have no other choice but to abide. This makes it common for sexual exploitation to come from guardians or family members, a social group, the school space, and where there is an imbalance of power and the perpetrator holds the power. This is why it is important to understand that children, developmentally, cannot give proper consent to any sexual act, even if they give a form of permission or an act of will.



As we can see graph provided by

<https://www.rainn.org/statistics/children-and-teens>, 93% of child sexual abuse comes from known contacts of the victim, and 1/3 of the reported sexual abuse cases are from a family member. This is why it is crucial to detect any signs of indication, due to a number of these cases being in their home or day-to-day locations where it might be difficult to directly stop.

### **Culture and Religion and its practices**

Religion and culture include practices that can put in danger the well-being of a child's health, and which often come from a lack of education and/or tradition and culture.

Female Genital Mutilation, which involves the partial or total removal of external female genitalia, is carried out for various reasons; non of them including medical reasons. FGM is a form of child sexual violence and is internationally recognized as a human rights violation.

According to the *World Health Organization*, some of the reasons why FGM is carried out are:

- FGM is a social convention (social norm), the social pressure to conform to what others do and have been doing, as well as the need to be accepted socially and the fear of being rejected by the community, are strong motivations to perpetuate the practice.
- FGM is often considered a necessary part of raising a girl and a way to prepare her for adulthood and marriage.
- FGM is often motivated by beliefs about what is considered acceptable sexual behavior. It aims to ensure premarital virginity and marital fidelity.
- Where it is believed that FGM increases marriageability, it is more likely to be carried out.
- FGM is associated with cultural ideals of femininity and modesty, which include the notion that girls are clean and beautiful after removal of body parts that are considered unclean, unfeminine, or male.
- Some people believe that the practice has religious support, although no religious scripts prescribe the practice.
- Local structures of power and authority, such as community leaders, religious leaders, circumcisers, and even some medical personnel can contribute to

upholding the practice. Likewise, when informed, they can be effective advocates for the abandonment of FGM.

- In most societies, where FGM is practiced, it is considered a cultural tradition, which is often used as an argument for its continuation.

According to *World Health Organization*, more than 200 million girls and women have been subjected to the practice, and 3 million girls are estimated to be at risk of FGM annually.

The practice of Child Marriage, which is the formal union or marriage of a child under 18, and an adult or another, has a link to sexual abuse of children. Its practice affects boys and girls, however, there is disproportionality among girls, which often are the victims of this practice. According to *OHCHR*, worldwide, more than 650 million women alive today were married as children, and every year, at least 12 million girls are married before they reach the age of 18. Generally, parents who forcibly subject their children to child marriage are driven by factors such as social and cultural norms, poverty, or humanitarian crises. Often, this practice happens in low-developed countries, where poverty continues to encourage this practice in families that use it as a way to sustain themselves. However, child marriage can have severe ramifications on a child's health and can lead to risks to their sexual and reproductive health. Children involved in this practice can suffer from rape, underage pregnancy, and permanent trauma that lasts to their adult life. In a position where they have no power, this practice continues to be prevalent and overlooked sexual abuse

which happens quite too often.

## **Age of Consent**

Age of consent aims to protect young adolescents from sexual abuse and the consequences that can come from early sexual activity. Generally, the minimum age of consent has been established to be 14-16 years for the majority of countries, but there still exist countries that have a lower age than 14 years and over 16 years. These have several negative consequences on adolescents. Underaged sexual activity can lead to several health risks and can include unwanted pregnancy and transmission of STDs and STIs.

## **Major Parties Involved and Their Views**

### **India**

India currently holds the largest amount of child brides, according to UNICEF, about 223 million child brides, which is  $\frac{1}{3}$  of the global. India has laws that state it is illegal for girls under 18 to marry, however almost 16 percent of all adolescent girls from 15-19 are currently married. Child Marriage, as previously stated, is one root that may promote child sexual abuse and exploitation. However, it has been shown that in the last 10 years, marriages of almost 25 million girls have been averted and saved from possible CSA.



## South Africa

South Africa has been shown to have the highest prevalence of child sexual abuse. It is estimated that overall, 36.8% of boys and 33.9% of girls have reported some form of CSA. One in every three adolescents reported having suffered a form of CSA. The 2020 Annual Crime Statistics have shown us that earlier that year more than 24,000 children were reported to be sexually assaulted. Numbers have also shown an increase in rapes, domestic violence, and just overall child murders, the majority of them being women who were raped. This report had an increase of 7% from last time. Many of these reasons come from the common factors that promote sexual abuse, such as economic poverty, armed conflicts, and the breakdown of families.

## Latin America

As previously stated, Latin America has much prevalence of the concern over age of consent. Additionally, it is highly patriarchal, causing inequalities and conflict between social groups, while also having weak institutions which do not help the several victims. However, we have seen more prevalence of dedication towards the issues from countries like Colombia, Ecuador, Mexico, Peru, and Paraguay from identifying children as individuals with rights, rather than minors who are under the sole authority and responsibility of their parents,

## Timeline of Events

<b>Date</b>	<b>Description of event</b>
1857	The first published work dedicated to the fight against child sexual abuse was published in France. " <i>Medical-Legal Studies of Sexual Assault</i> "
1948	The first national estimate of the cases of child sexual abuse was published publically
1968	Now 44 out of the 50 states had mandatory laws that required physicians to report cases of child abuse and suspicions.
1974	The enactment of Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act was created in conjunction with the National Center for Child Abuse and Neglect. With this creation, the cases reported have increased dramatically.
1979	National Abuse Coalifing was designed with the hopes of making congress create more sexual abuse laws.
1986	Congress passed the Child Abuse Victims' Rights Act, which gave children power in civil cases related to sexual abuse.
1980s-1990s	The issue became more widespread, and more prosecution and detection were being reported. Because of this, many laws began to be created and there was overall more support. It became a focus of professional attention.

2000-2008

Much attention was brought to the teacher-pupil relationship that might promote any sexual abuse and sexual assault. Many countries took action by implementing laws against this, with major cases like the 2008 Zambia issue, where a girl was awarded 45 million Zambian Kwacha because of rape and sexual abuse by her teacher

### **UN involvement, Relevant Resolutions, Treaties and Events**

The United Nations and its various committees have made various attempts and shown a clear intention of dedication to the prevention of sexual abuse, harassment, and exploitation of children and adolescents. They have made consistent efforts to address the issue and fight it through awareness campaigns, articles, treaties, etc.

- On June 22, 2020, The United Nations Human Rights Council (HRC) acquired a resolution that has the goal of *“Mandate of the Special Rapporteur on the sale and sexual exploitation of children, including child prostitution, child pornography, and other child sexual abuse material.”* The resolution in itself shows deep concern over the sale and sexual exploitation of children and seeks the aid of the Special Rapporteur.
- In 2010, United Nations launched a global campaign that focuses on spreading awareness to get the most social and political support they can

get to further emphasize the prevention of child sexual exploitation. The OPSC, “Optional Protocols to the Convention on the Rights of the Child.” had a great impact on the community and spread awareness of the mission to protect all children below the age of 18 against all forms of sexual exploitation.



- - On December 12, 2019, UNICEF co-chaired the “*United Nations Protocol on the Provision of Assistance to Victims of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse*,” which aims to refer and provide assistance to survivors and victims of sexual exploitation and abuse.

## Previous Attempts to Resolve the Issue

### Enough Abuse

“Enough Abuse” is a campaign developed in Massachusetts and has been adopted by several leaders of states, including New York, New Jersey, Maryland, California, Nevada, South Dakota, Missouri, and Maine. However, it has also been launched in various West African nations, including Nigeria and Sierra Leone. It is a campaign that has won awards, collaborated with Marvel Comics, and was the first to produce a statewide sexual abuse prevention media campaign in the US. The campaign identifies proven effective public health strategies from other movements and has confidence that CSA is preventable. It pushes citizens to be involved, know facts, and get vocal, to keep advocating for prevention.

### #ChildSafetyOnlineNow

Child Safety Online Now, launched by the “End Violence Partnership” is a campaign with a partnership of 14 different organizations who are dedicated to protecting the health and well-being of children. The organization focuses on the issue of Social Media. According to the partnership and End Violence Partnership,

- 1 in 5 users of digital services in the EU is a child.
- 62% of all reported CSAM in 2021 was hosted in Europe.
- In 2021, the Internet Watch Foundation found child sexual abuse material online every two minutes.

- Public polling shows widespread public support (68%) for the use of technical tools to identify child sexual abuse material and for the European Union to introduce legislative change to help improve child safety.

The Campaign goal focuses on the European Commissions Proposal to ensure the prevention of the spread of child sexual abuse online. Its proposal aims to build a system where it is mandatory that technological platforms detect, report, and remove CSAM. This new campaign also aims to build a more transparent connection with online service providers and law enforcement agencies.

### **Possible Solutions**

Solutions to prevent sexual abuse, harassment, and exploitation of children do exist and can be possible. On a bigger scale, governments and nations need to enforce regulations and laws that protect children from these types of abuse. Enforcing the age of consent, and changing its law if necessary. This change of regulation also includes practices like the previously mentioned FGM and child marriage itself. Regulations are the first step, however, the biggest impact will come from the community. Awareness needs to be spread, seeing as how many of the roots and occurrences of these cases happen in the homes of children and in their personal spaces. Awareness will not only inform people of the issue, and spark more interest, but will also make cases less frequent since people will be more alerted of any signs of CSB. These steps could be first taken by marches or protests, and anyway, that awareness can be spread throughout

the community. The spreading of knowledge through the community will also promote the spreading of education, which can also teach certain groups and fill in the misconceptions and beliefs that ultimately cause harm.

## **Sustainable Development Goal (SDG)**

### **#3: Good Health and Well-Being**

This Sustainable Development Goal relates to this issue because the issue of the matter is providing the needed protection and safety for children that suffer from this sexual abuse and its various forms. The goal is to ensure their well-being, and health is in good shape, this including the physical and mental risk that comes from sexual abuse, harassment, and exploitation.

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## Appendix:

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- New Protocol System assisting the Violence Against Children Partnership and information about it