

CONFERENCE PAPER:

THE CHALLENGE OF PROTECTING BOYS FROM SEXUAL ABUSE

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Introduction

It is widely believed that one in three Australian girls and one in from five to ten boys are sexually abused before they leave school. Using Australian and international research findings, this paper will show that the vulnerability and victimization of boys is substantially under-recognised and under-reported, that boys have been disadvantaged by child sexual abuse being regarded as a feminist issue and that child protection curriculum has not yet been developed to meet the special needs of boys.

Child sex abuse – a feminist issue

The problem of child sex abuse was brought to public notice by American feminists in the late 1970's. Australian women followed their example in the early 80's. Rape Crisis Centres received government funding to provide services for female victims. Some centres held well-publicised state-wide phone-ins that revealed the myth of the dangerous stranger and the fact that the greatest risk to girls was the trusted male in the home environment. Adelaide Rape Crisis Centre had a notice on the door that said, "No males may enter this building", strengthening the belief that only females were victims and offenders were males. This disadvantaged boys and it was not until 1993 that there was a similar phone-in for men. That took place in Western Australia. One third of callers were reported to have disclosed sexual abuse by females but this received little publicity.

Sadly, men did not stand up to be counted. No-one said, "Hey! Don't forget that boys are abused too and boys need support and treatment services as much as girls". The assumption was that either boys were not abused or it did them no harm (Goldman and Goldman 1986)¹. The only vocal men were those in denial, alleging that reports were concocted or, at best, exaggerated, by feminists determined to destroy the traditional family. Unfortunately that still occurs.

Not surprisingly, the first sex abuse prevention program was written by American women attached to *Women Against Rape* (WAR), working from a Columbus (Ohio) Rape Crisis Centre (1976). Originally intended for adult rape victims, it was sought by secondary school principals to address the high incidence of date rape. This led to the writing of the Child Abuse Prevention Program (CAPP 1978) which was subsequently used in Australia and New Zealand. CAPP focussed on violent abduction by strangers. That and subsequent programs focused on the protection of girls, referring to offenders as he and victims as she.

In 1984, Victoria Police statistics showed that only 6% of reports of child sex abuse involved strangers. This resulted in pressure from the women's movement to replace their 'Stranger Danger' information with a more realistic program. A multi-professional committee chose the Wisconsin Protective Behaviours Program for non-educational reasons. First it was perceived as inexpensive, consisting of 8-typed sheets, requiring no kits or videos. Second, it claimed to stop sexual abuse without mentioning sex. Third, its

author, social worker Peg Flandreau West, claimed that it was proven effective for all ages from 2-92. In fact, it had never been evaluated independently with children. Nevertheless, it was promoted Australia-wide, initially as a temporary measure until Australian curriculum writers had sufficient experience to produce a program that was more culturally appropriate.

Developed from an American Rape Crisis empowerment model, Protective Behaviours assumes that all sexual touching feels unsafe. For its effectiveness, it relies on (a) children identifying and reporting their unsafe feelings to trusted adults and (b) adults responding supportively. Although vague and littered with jargon, its introduction was fought by the Australian Family Association which influenced Opposition politicians to spread the fear that programs would lead to family breakdown and fathers would be accused falsely.

Briggs and Hawkins (1990, 1994a, 1994b, 1996a, 1996b) found that the Protective Behaviours Program was seriously flawed as a tool for preventing and stopping child sexual abuse, especially the abuse of boys. In interviews with 198 male victims of abuse (1994), 43% revealed that they liked some aspect of the sexual experience. They enjoyed the excitement and pleasurable sensation of genital fondling, oral sex and viewing pornography. Some likened their involvement with paedophile groups as akin to joining a secret club. They felt privileged to be given premature access to the secrets of adult male sexuality. They enjoyed the grooming process, the gifts, attention, flattery and ego-boosting that paedophiles use to create an emotional bond. Because grooming is often a prolonged and carefully planned process, even when the abuse became violent, boys continued to believe that their abusers loved them and it was their own fault that they suffered pain. They were told they were too tense, should relax and it would get better with practice. Boys were confused when the person they loved was assuring them that anal rape felt great while they found it excruciatingly painful, bled and had difficulty walking. Although 52% were anally raped and 57% had to provide oral sex, an astonishing 78.5% of male victims believed that what was happening constituted 'normal' behaviour. When asked what could have protected them, they dismissed the Protective Behaviours concepts as useless, referring instead to explicit sexuality education that would make them less vulnerable through sexual curiosity; in other words, they needed to know about erections, masturbation and ejaculation long before they reached puberty. Second, they said they would have been less vulnerable if they received attention, approval and tenderness from their macho, absent or dysfunctional male carers. However it should be noted that 53% were abused by close family members and 65% were abused by neighbours as well as by offenders in their wider social environment. Only 13% were abused by strangers who usually created a relationship to provide more opportunities for contact.

New Zealand Police and Ministry of Education rejected the Protective Behaviours Program as both too vague and too complex to help children to stop abuse by authority figures. They, along with the New South Wales Education Department wrote their own age-appropriate comprehensive safety curriculum. South Australia has recently followed their example. It is anticipated that the Northern Territory will adopt the South Australian

model but in the meantime, Queensland Police and Western Australia continue to promote Protective Behaviours seventeen years after it was shown to be deficient for the identification and prevention of sexual abuse.

Child sexual abuse thrives on ignorance and secrecy. School-based child protection programs are essential because, even now, parents don't know how to give children appropriate information without causing alarm. Briggs and Hawkins (2005) found that even when children had been sexually abused, parents avoided the topic and talked only about avoiding kidnap by strangers. Finkelhor and colleagues surveyed some 2000 children for American Scouts and found that any child protection program is better than none but, the more comprehensive and explicit the program, the more likely that children develop and use safety strategies (Finkelhor, Asdigian & Dziuba-Leatherman 1995). And while a program may not stop abuse from happening, it enables students to report it quickly and feel positive (rather than guilty) about their involvement, thus facilitating a much healthier long-term outcome. Briggs and Hawkins (1990,1996c) reached the same conclusion in New Zealand with the additional finding that children with the best knowledge were those taught by enthusiastic teachers with parental involvement.

However, it remains a concern that state school-based programs have been written by teachers, most of whom are women who lack the knowledge of how the grooming and abuse of boys differs from the abuse of girls, how it affects them and what boys need to know to stay safe.

The size of the problem

The statistic most commonly quoted by governments and child protection services is that 'one in three girls and one in seven to ten boys are sexually abused before they leave school'. This is clearly unreliable because it refers to reports and boys simply don't identify abuse correctly and make reports.

In 1994, Briggs, Hawkins and Williams (ibid) learned that 198 Australian male victims had been sexually abused by a total of 1700 perpetrators. Only 26 boys tried to report one of their offenders; only one succeeded but there was no prosecution. Twenty-five boys were disbelieved and/or punished for concocting disgusting stories about trusted people and all 1700 sex offenders remained free to re-offend.

Dube and Hebert (1988) had already found that researchers were asking the wrong questions: male victims don't accept sexual misbehaviour as abuse because sexual experience per se is acceptable to the male culture. Lewis (1985) found that when asked about sexual experiences (rather than abuse), the gender gap closed.

Research findings are often unreliable because responses depend not only on how questions are worded but who asks them. For example, male victims and offenders told Briggs and Williams (Briggs, Hawkins and Williams 1994) that they would not have talked to them had they been male researchers (because of embarrassment, guilt, homophobia taboos and fears relating to their sexuality) or young female post-graduates (who would have been perceived as sexually threatening). A leading British researcher

told an ACCAN Conference at Griffith University that he had to withdraw from a similar research project because male child sex offenders refused to talk to him about their childhood experiences.

When 84 convicted Australian child sex offenders were asked whether they had been sexually abused in childhood, all except one responded negatively (Briggs *et al* 1994). When they were asked about sexual experiences in childhood, they revealed offences committed by an average of 14.2 offenders, 50% of whom were females. In addition, 95 male survivors had been abused by an average of 2.2 different perpetrators, 23% of whom were females. That figure is substantially higher than that suggested in the NSPCC's (Bunting 2005) literature review relating to female offenders ("up to 5%" p.5).ⁱⁱ Contrary to popular belief, none of the Australian females was accompanied by or under the control of a male. They were child-minders, neighbours, older sisters and their friends, two mothers and grandmothers. Female offenders provided genital manipulation and/or oral sex which boys found pleasant. They did not define it as abuse because it didn't hurt. Importantly, the early sexualisation process itself proved to be damaging; the boys became obsessed with genitals, their interest was spotted by more violent paedophiles and pederasts who abused them again and again. They often came to the attention of teachers who merely reprimanded them for their rude behaviour.

British (Bentovim 1991), American (Abel, Becker, Mittelman, Cunningham-Rathner, Rouleau & Murphy 1989) and Australian researchers (Briggs *et al* 1994) showed that the average male child sex offender begins offending in adolescence. Abel and colleagues (1987) reported that 42% of offenders (N=411) reported being sexually aroused by children by the age of fifteen and offenders chose to abuse boys more frequently than girls. More recently, with a sample of 4007 self reported offenders, Abel and Harlow (2001) found that one in twenty adolescent males is already a paedophile who fantasises about sex with children. Researching with 558 convicted incest offenders Bentovim (1991) found that a male offender commits an average of 522 child sex crimes before being apprehended. Abel et al (1987) researching with 561 offenders found that they had committed an average of 520 crimes against children at an average age of 31.5 years. Comparatively little information has been gathered about female offenders.

Dorais (2002) reports that Canadian researchers surveyed 1,213 grade 6 - 8 students at Toronto area schools and found that 22% of boys had been the recipients of *unwanted sex in the previous 6 weeks*. How many others participated willingly is not known. Another Canadian study showed that boys were first abused at an average age of 8 years, 4 months (Dorais, 2002).

O'Leary (2001) researching with 145 Australian male survivors found that the mean age of the first incident of abuse was 8.14 years. In 1998, a survey of 4,519 child sexual abuse investigations conducted by Social Services Agencies in Canada in 1998 showed that 16% involved boys in the 4-7 age group (Trocmé et al., 2001).

Abel and Harlow (2001) asked 4007 child molesters how old they were when they committed their first sex offence against children. Offenders abused boys at an earlier age

than they abused girls: 63% before the age of 16 versus 44%.; 76% before the age of 20 versus 54%.

Cook and Howell (1981) were among the first to suggest that boys are highly vulnerable to sexual abuse because they live in more sexualised environments and are more curious than girls. They noted that boys talk about genitals from around the age of three and masturbate from age 3-7 years. At the age of six, boys have a much wider sexual vocabulary than girls as reflected in their 'dirty jokes' and verbal exchanges. Male genitals are less private than girls' and when boys start school they handle them in public toilets several times a day. The visibility of male erections enables boys to see evidence of sexual arousal and this facilitates the introduction of peer-group sex. Briggs et al (1994) found that sexualised peer groups are vulnerable to predators. It is relatively easy for offenders to persuade members to do with adults what they are already doing with their mates if incentives are offered. Furthermore, an abuse victim can contaminate a normal, healthy sexually curious peer-group by providing information about sexual deviance, giving demonstrations and gaining kudos for their sophisticated knowledge. These factors, coupled with a high level of curiosity, increase boys' vulnerability to abuse and decrease the likelihood that they will identify and report it.

Few male victims report sexual abuse

Hunter (1990) was one of the first authors to suggest that the sexual abuse of boys is substantially under-reported. Even when therapists asked clients about abuse, those who were victims seldom reported it. This was not because of distrust or dishonesty but the fact that males have a different definition of abuse, a definition that does not include what happens to them. Similarly Dube and Hebert (1988) showed that despite high levels of violence and emotional damage, two thirds of 511 male victims denied that their experiences constituted abuse, blaming themselves for what happened.

Hunter (1990) found that if the offender was a woman or an older youth or sibling or they liked any part of the activity or did not say 'No' and escape, male adult survivors minimised the experience, dismissing it as a game, fun or normal behaviour. This protects the offender and the victim takes the blame. If boys do say 'No' and escape, they do not regard abuse as reportable because they continue to believe that they were in control.

Other factors that increase the likelihood of secrecy include male sex role conditioning, homophobia, the lack of societal encouragement to report and seek treatment and fears of stigmatisation. Finkelhor (1984) found that male victims were unable to talk about their abuse because of the sense of shame. They accepted responsibility for what happened even though a third of offences occurred before the age of six. As adults, male victims have difficulty in understanding that they were too young to make informed decisions about participation and were chosen because they were ill-informed and not because they were identified as weak, effeminate and innately gay. Some adult survivors are afraid of disclosing abuse because of the correlation between victimisation and offending and the fear that they will be perceived as future offenders.

O’Leary and Barber (2001) surveyed 145 male and 151 female victims. Participants were asked about disclosure at the time of the abuse and the length of time it took for them to discuss the experience. Comparisons showed that boys were significantly less likely than girls to disclose abuse at the time it occurred and also took significantly longer to discuss their childhood experiences later in life. Boys will keep abuse secret whether asked to do so or not (Briggs *et al* 1994).

Retrospective self-reports show a much higher proportion of male victims than official reports, suggesting significant under-reporting by boys . Not surprisingly, a key finding of the Queensland Crime Commission and Queensland Police Service (2000) report on child sexual abuse was the low level of disclosure, especially by boys, resulting in a recommendation that a survey of male victims and survivors of childhood sexual abuse be undertaken to uncover the impediments to disclosure.

A review of research by Paine and Hansen (2002) showed that the rate of non-disclosure among boys increases with age, leading authors to suggest that boys may be reluctant to disclose because of factors related to male socialization and their masculinity, such as an over-emphasis on self-reliance, being brave and strong, contempt for victims and homosexuals, and an obsession with macho behaviour (Cermak & Molitor, 1996; Dhaliwal, Gauzas, Antonowicz, & Ross, 1996; Finkelhor *et al.*, 1990; Nelson & Oliver, 1998; Paine & Hansen, 2002; Roane, 1992; Spataro, Moss, & Wells, 2001; Watkins & Bentovim, 1992, 2000 cited in O’Leary and Barber 2001).

The findings of Fondacaro, Holt, and Powell (1999) confirmed Briggs *et al’s* (1994) finding that many male victims are confused about what precisely constitutes sexual abuse. In Fondacaro *et al’s* 1999 study of male prisoners, 41% of the men who reported childhood abuse did not consider their experiences to be abusive. The same study also found there were differences in long term effects between victims who classified their experience as abusive compared with those who did not. Victims who did not consider themselves to be victims had higher rates of substance abuse, while those who knew they were victims showed higher rates of post-traumatic stress disorder and obsessive-compulsive disorder. Abel and Harlow (2001) found that boys believe it is in their own best interests to remain silent . Steever, Follette, and Naugle (2001) showed that male victims who identified themselves as survivors reported nearly twice the level of psychological distress as men in other groups, suggesting that non-disclosure may be easier for males than disclosure.. If so, there is an added psychological incentive to remain silent.

Another concern is the lack of empathy for male victims by society in general and male professionals in particular. Psychologists are significantly less likely to consider sexual abuse in males than in females, even when identical case histories are reported (Holmes & Offen, 1996; Richey-Suttles & Remer, 1997). Spencer and Tan (1999) found that as the age of the male victim increases, there is an increase in the level of blame. As recently as 1999, male psychology students were found to be significantly more likely than females to attribute blame to male victims of any age. Negative attitudes clearly have the potential to discourage boys and male survivors from disclosing abuse. Victims

have often told the author that psychologists and psychiatrists caused as much psychological harm as their abusers. They did this by implying that (a) they must have enjoyed it given that it happened more than once and (b) they must have been stupid to allow it to happen (d) being male they should have been able to put it behind them and get on with their lives. Sensitive therapists are few and far between and they usually have waiting lists.

In a sample of 198 Australian male victims (Briggs et al 1994), 29% described being abused by adolescents and 29% by adults before they were aged 6; 54% by adolescents and 44% by adults when age 6-10 and 59% by adolescents and 68% by adults when aged 11-15. Those abused in early childhood tended to be victimized continually into adolescence by an average of 8.5 offenders. Those who became offenders were characterized by the sheer volume of abuse they experienced and their acceptance of abuse as normal. They also identified with their abusers.

Boys are more likely than girls to be abused in group situations such as camps, clubs, sports changing rooms and schools. Boys who hesitate about participating are demeaned: 'What's wrong with you? Everyone else does it'. Paradoxically they are told that, 'This is what real guys do...Its fun.... You're weird'. As boys don't want to be perceived as different from their peers, they will join in reluctantly.

Paedophiles and pederasts use their male victims to recruit others, offering financial and other incentives. They routinely offer cigarettes, cannabis, alcohol and pornography to lower resistance, stimulate boys' curiosity and desensitize them to and normalize deviant sex. This is a deliberate strategy to protect offenders from prosecution. Even if boys are unhappy about what is happening, they won't 'dob' their mates. Furthermore, if they try to withdraw, they find they are trapped once they have accepted drugs (etc) banned at home. 'What will your mum say when she knows that you've been drinking beer...'. The victim is blamed for his own abuse and he carries the burden of guilt into adulthood.

The grooming strategies used with boys often differ from those used with girls. This has implications for child protection programs. Van Dam (2001) maintains that parents and human service professionals should know the grooming methods to protect the children in their care.

King and Woollett (1997) confirmed that men took in excess of 17 years to seek assistance for abuse related problems. O'Leary reported that only 26% ($n = 73$) of the males told someone about their abuse shortly after it occurred compared with 63.6% ($n = 96$) of female victims. Some took twenty years to disclose what happened. The Commissioner for the current South Australian Inquiry into the Sexual Abuse of State Wards, Ted Mullighan, has said that males can only discuss their abuse when they are secure in their sexuality and are well supported and some of those giving evidence have waited more than 20 years to disclose what happened. A man drove all the way from Kalgoorlie to the Adelaide office to give evidence but panicked at the last moment and drove back again. Research on the effects of abuse indicates that many of these men

experienced serious psychological problems without seeking assistance regarding their child victimization (Ferguson & Mullen, 1999; Tyler 2002).

In 2002-3, the author acted as professional witness for a very large number of young men who had been sexually abused by a counsellor in elite independent schools. The boys were unaware that what was happening was reportable abuse. Those who dared to question the perpetrator were assured that what was happening was the latest form of relaxation therapy, far more effective than ‘old-fashioned talk’. Despite not realising that they were victims, many exhibited the behaviours associated with abuse: angry and anti-social behaviour, deterioration in school performance, school drop-out, relationship problems and experimentation, alcohol and drug abuse and suicidal ideation. It is easy for offenders to convince boys that they ‘wanted it’ and are homosexual when their bodies respond to genital fondling (as most do). Abel and Harlow (2001) suggest that, unsure of their sexuality, 70% of boy victims of male abusers engage in homosexual experimentation, placing themselves back in the victim role thereby increasing their psychological problems.

Recently, considerable attention has been given to historical cases involving churches, religious institutions and residential facilities for children in state care. Paradoxically juries are told that victims’ evidence has less credibility if they didn’t report the abuse shortly after it occurred. This fails to take account of research findings that victims take a substantial amount of time to disclose abuse.

O’Leary suggested that as his subjects were victims before child abuse was publicised by the media, the situation may have changed. Recent New Zealand research with intermediate and secondary schoolboys (Briggs and Hawkins) showed that nothing has changed.

A Comparison of Male and Female Disclosure at the Time of the Abuse and Discussion of the Abuse

	Men	Women
<i>Disclosure at the time of the abuse</i>	<i>n</i> = 122	<i>n</i> = 151
Disclosed	26.2%	63.6%
No disclosure	73.8%	36.4%
 <i>Time taken to discuss abuse</i>	 <i>n</i> = 145	 <i>n</i> = 138
Less than 1 year	9.7%	14.5%
Less than 10 years	17.2%	36.2%
Less than 20 years	28.3%	23.9%

More than 20 years

44.9%

25.4%

Reproduced with the kind permission of O'Leary and Barber (2001)

Research with New Zealand boys

In 1996, Briggs and Hawkins (1996d) surveyed two-hundred-and fifty-two 10-12 year old students in ten New Zealand intermediate schools, one third of whom were boys. In answer to questions about their use of the safety strategies taught in school, 23% of girls and 8% of boys told researchers that they had been sexually abused by adults or older youths. Eight percent of parents reported that their children had experienced molestation and 50% of these incidents had been reported to police. The likelihood of such attempts occurring increased with age and victims were most likely to be described by staff as 'below average academic ability'. Eight male victims cooperated with offenders; six did nothing and seven ran away. Girls showed a much higher level of maturity and a better knowledge of safety strategies than boys, even though they had all been recently exposed to the same child protection curriculum.

A big concern was that boys consistently told researchers that child protection information was irrelevant to them and they 'didn't bother to listen' because 'only girls and poofs/gays/homos get raped and they deserve it'. If boys previously attended primary schools where the curriculum was not taught, they were too embarrassed to discuss child protection issues with their parents at the intermediate school level. Similarly, the parents felt unable to discuss the program with their sons; the taboos were already in place.

Two fathers and one mother told interviewers that their 11-14 year old sons were sex offenders. They were attending behaviour modification programs. Neither teachers nor family members had considered the possibility that the boys might be victims of sexual abuse; parents and staff assumed that their behaviour was the result of early sexual development.

Some parents disclosed that their sons were at high risk because they lived in incestuous families. Nevertheless, despite their knowledge of offending by grandfathers and uncles, mothers were not prepared to report offences to authorities.

Twenty-eight percent of 10-14 year olds told researchers that they had seen pornography, usually in their own homes or those of friends. Some fathers share porn with their sons. Boys were very open about their interest and it became clear that the topic must be tackled in child protection curriculum because of its widespread use by paedophiles prior to the commission of illegal sexual acts.

Intermediate school students disclosed that offenders were mothers and step-mothers (3), fathers (5) and foster father (1), grandfathers (2) and other relatives ('many'). family friends and lodgers (15). Overall, below-average boys were at greatest risk of sexual abuse, being offered drugs and pornography and carrying weapons. Fifty-percent had unsupportive homes. Parents were the ones least likely to discuss child protection issues

and their sons did not complete their child protection homework. This highlights the problem that the children who most need safety strategies are the ones least involved in school safety curriculum. School estimates of academic achievement offered a useful way to determine children at most risk.

The evaluation of New Zealand's national child protection curriculum at secondary level (Briggs & Hawkins, 2001 and 2006), reinforced earlier concerns. Boys showed a lack of knowledge about sexual issues, legislation relating to the age of consent and their right to force others to provide oral and vaginal sex. Interviewing boys at schools in low socio-economic areas and elite colleges, researchers were told repeatedly that only girls and gays are sexually assaulted. It became apparent that some boys had already been abused but peer-group homophobia would have deterred them from making reports. Both boys and girls engaged in sexual activity, especially at parties, because it was a peer-group expectation. Only those in long-term relationships used contraception. Many said they didn't enjoy the sex but 'did it' because young people go to parties to 'get drunk and get laid' in the fastest possible time.

In 2005-6, Briggs and Hawkins investigated safety issues with boys and girls identified as three or more years behind their age group in all aspects of the curriculum. The ages of respondents ranged from 11 to 17 years (mean 13.8). All of the boys had recently undertaken a sex education program but few could recall child protection curriculum.

More boys (18.2%) more than girls (16.4%) were subjected to sexual taunts and insults as a form of bullying and some were subjected to malicious gossip relating to their morals and sexuality. "Its sex stuff. They tell lies about you and suggest you're doing homosexual stuff when you're not".

Boys were significantly more likely than girls to have been offered alcohol (57%), cigarettes (50%), marijuana (48%), heroin (22%), speed (17%) and cocaine (13%). Most drugs were offered by peers in and outside school with 30% receiving them from adults who were mostly relatives. Drugs used included sniffing markers (28%), petrol (28%), Twink (22%) asthma medication (16%), amphetamines (15%) ecstasy or fantasy (10%). Only 15% of students had taken none.

Seventeen percent of students reported that strangers had tried to persuade them to accompany them and there was no significant difference in the frequency with which this happened to boys and girls.

In response to a question about rude behaviour, 44% of boys revealed they had been sexually abused by older youths (10%), family friends (2%) and stepfathers (2%). Only one boy had made a report prior to the research and the abuse occurred when he was very young. Two boys made reports to the researchers involving (a) a 'girl-friend' who was aged 21 with whom he had been having sexual intercourse since the age of twelve and (b) an older male student in the same school.

Boys also told researchers of abuse by (a) an older male, (b) a female neighbour ten years his senior, (c) a 19 year old brother, (d) a cousin who provided drugs, (e) men they knew, (f) male cousins (g) a man in a public toilet (h) an uncle.

While most abused girls reported rape, only two boys referred to anal rape. The remainder mentioned 'wanking' and providing 'blow jobs' for older youths in school toilets and sports changing rooms. This happened with such frequency that boys regarded it as 'normal, 'a private matter' and not reportable. One said, 'I didn't report it because I didn't think it was that important'. "I did nothing about it. I didn't think it was wrong". This finding should be viewed with caution given that in the earlier retrospective study (Briggs and Hawkins 1994) 52% of male victims disclosed anal rape.

When asked why they had not reported abuse, boys referred to the fear that:

- a) no-one would believe them
- b) the abusers would beat them up
- c) their peers would find out and taunt them as 'poof'

One said 'I'm scared of having a knife pulled out on me...A lot carry knives'.

Another said his abuser threatened to kill him if he told. Another did not report because he was afraid of being laughed at.

Twenty-two percent of both boys and girls reported that 'kids' of their own age forced them to do sex things when they were under the age of consent. Same-sex assaults were confined to males.

Boys clearly felt the need to present a strong image. For example one said, 'It was an adult male, I punched him in the nose and cracked his nose'. Another claimed that members of the Mongrel Mob had bashed the perpetrator.

Again, the advanced maturity of girls was evident when we asked about the age of consent. Girls referred to the fact that child sex abuse can be both psychologically and physically damaging to children. They referred to the disparity in knowledge and power when an older person abuses a child and the difficulties children have in saying no to adults. Three girls and no boys referred to the risk of pregnancy and only six boys (N=55) knew that child sex abuse is against the law. Eleven boys described it as simply 'disgusting' ('their bodies are yuck') but some were uncertain and said, 'It depends on who it is' and 'It depends on how old you are'. There was confusion among both sexes as to whether a relationship gave males the right to force girls to have sex if girls were aged 14 or over. Only 9% of boys were aware of laws relating to rape.

When asked what boys could do if a male wanted them to engage in sexual activity, 20% gave violent responses.

- , "I'd say touch me and you'll die"..
- , "I'd crack his nose. I did it once"
- , "I'd hit him around the head with anything I can get my hands on"
- , "Walk away and smack them. If they are taller than me, run like hell"
- , "I'd punch them over and run"

- , “Smack them over and give them a hiding”
- , “I’d smash them”
- , “Punch them and say Go away”
- , “Kick them in the groin and run”

To a separate question, 29% said they would report sexual misbehaviour to school staff, police or relatives and 29% said that rejection would suffice without reporting.

When asked what they could do if older students behaved sexually, 36% said they would make a report to school staff but the majority referred to risks that offenders would learn of the report and wreak revenge.

- , Tell no-one. If you tell a teacher you’re a tell-tale and they might get even
- , I wouldn’t report it.. its not important
- , Say no and run but don’t report it
- , It depends on who he is (2)
- , Don’t know. He might threaten you.
- , Don’t do anything you’d get into trouble.

Sixteen percent said they would respond aggressively.

- , “Punch him and tell him to piss off”
- , “I’d smash them”
- , “Pin their heads in”
- , “Tell them to piss off”.
- , “I’d say Touch me and you’ll die then punch him”

Aggressive responses were sheer fantasy given that 44% of respondents had already been abused and all but one had responded compliantly without reporting it.

Conclusion

Boys are at greater risk of sexual abuse than reports indicate. They do not report sexual crimes because they do not recognise them as reportable offences or they are afraid to do so. When male offenders are involved, they are afraid of violence, being disbelieved, getting into trouble and, worse, being taunted as gay and effeminate. They worry about their sexuality and imagine that they were abused because they were identified as gay, not because they were young, uninformed and vulnerable. In addition, boys may find genital fondling and the receipt of oral sex pleasurable and that, in turn, increases both the difficulty of rejecting more obnoxious and painful abuse and the offenders’ opportunity to blame the victim for his abuse. Guilt and embarrassment prevent reporting and can lead to long term psychological harm resulting in physical and/or mental illness, low self-esteem, suicidal ideation and suicide attempts, poor concentration, relationship problems, drug and alcohol abuse, angry anti-social behaviour and crime, including repeating the abuse with children. .

Bentovim (2006) and Abel et al (1987) found that one in 4-5 male victims re-enacts the abuse and becomes an offender while Abel and Harlow (2001) found that one in twenty male adolescents is already a paedophile. Abel et al (2001) suggest that if young

offenders are identified and receive treatment, they have a high chance of leading normal lives.

Quite clearly the protection of boys has been neglected compared with the abuse of girls. Given the cost of child sexual abuse to society, the taxpayer and the individual, this has to be rectified.

Boys need school-based child protection programs that involve parents and address issues relevant to them. Some of those issues are clearly different from issues for girls.

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