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Guidance Note for the Prevention and Response to Sexual Violence against Boys in CAR

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Acronyms

ASP	All Survivors Project
CAR	Central African Republic
CP AoR	Child Protection Area of Responsibility
CRSV	Conflict-related sexual violence
GBV	Gender-based violence
GBV AoR	Gender-Based Violence Area of Responsibility
GBVIMS	Gender-Based Violence Information Management System
IEC	Information, Education, Communication
IRC	International Rescue Committee
MPGPFFE	Ministry for the Promotion of Gender, and the Protection of Women, the Family and Children
MSF	Médecins Sans Frontières (Doctors Without Borders)
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
OSRSG-CAAC	Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict
OSRSG-VAC	Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence against Children
SOGIESC	Sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression and sex characteristics
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
WRC	Women's Refugee Commission



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Background for the Guidance Note

In 2022, All Survivors Project (ASP) undertook research as an implementing partner of the Office of the Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict (OSRSG-CAAC) in the Central African Republic (CAR) to produce the report "Responding to conflict-related sexual violence against boys associated with armed forces and armed groups in reintegration programmes".

As ASP's research with the OSRSG-CAAC points out,

"At the domestic level, CAR's 2010 Penal Code is gender inclusive insofar as it criminalises rape (defined in Article 87 of the Code as "any act of sexual penetration of whatever nature committed by one person upon another through violence, constraint, threats or surprise"). Article 86 criminalises "indecent assault" of a child "of any gender" with or without violence while Article 87 provides that "any indecent assault, committed or attempted, on a child below 15 of any gender is qualified as rape". The Penal Code incorporates war crimes and crimes against humanity, including sexual slavery, rape, forced prostitution, forced pregnancy, forced sterilisation and other forms of sexual violence of a similar level (Articles 153-157)."¹

The report's findings highlighted that "the lack of understanding of the scale and nature of sexual violence against boys in CAR ensures that protection strategies for boys are neither developed nor built into the design and implementation of responses for survivors".²

Research has shown that this lack of awareness, demonstrated by a failure to document sexual violence against boys either qualitatively or quantitatively, results in a lack of gender-sensitive resources and services. Efforts to improve the response to boy victims/survivors of sexual violence must therefore bring attention to the issue and develop a range of appropriate services and approaches to address it.

The main purpose of this note, produced by ASP, the Child Protection (CP AoR) and Gender-Based Violence (GBV AoR) Areas of Responsibility and the Government of Central African Republic (Ministère de la Promotion du Genre, de la protection de la Femme, la Famille et de l'enfant) in CAR, is to guide all child protection stakeholders and associated entities (including in health, justice, education, etc.) in supporting and offering services to boy survivors of sexual violence in humanitarian settings.

This guidance note was produced at the request of child protection stakeholders in CAR following the completion and presentation of ASP's research results and report in 2023 in Bangui and Bria. It is based on best practices developed by national and international child protection organisations.

This guidance note is not exhaustive but presents a summary of issues and recommendations to be considered by CP stakeholders. This guidance is intended to ensure that boy survivors can access their right to safe, ethical, survivor-centred, gender- and child-appropriate support and services in a way that does not divert attention or resources from the pressing needs of girls.

¹ Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict (OSRSG-CAAC), [Responding to conflict-related sexual violence against boys associated with armed forces and armed groups in reintegration programmes](#), 2022, p. 23. For more information on the legal framework regarding GBV in CAR, refer to the "Stratégie nationale de lutte contre les violences basées sur le genre, les pratiques néfastes et le mariage d'enfant en République Centrafricaine" (MPGPFFE, 2019, pp 14-20).

² (OSRSG-CAAC), [Responding to conflict-related sexual violence against boys associated with armed forces and armed groups in reintegration programmes](#), 2022, p. 36.



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Are boys affected by sexual violence?

"Sexual violence perpetrated against children is one of the most significant crises of our time, affecting children of all ages and genders across all country contexts. It is imperative that those responding to child sexual abuse in their communities are aware of the occurrence and characteristics of child sexual abuse both globally and locally."³

Sexual violence is defined as any sexual act, attempt to obtain a sexual act, unwanted sexual comments or advances, or acts to traffic or otherwise, directed against a person's sexuality using coercion. This act can be by any person regardless of their relationship to the victim and can occur in any setting, including but not limited to home and work. Coercion can cover a wide spectrum of degrees of force including: physical force, psychological intimidation and blackmail, or other threats (such as the threat of physical harm, of being dismissed from a job or of not obtaining a job that is sought). It may also occur when the person aggressed is unable to give consent (for example while drunk, drugged, asleep or mentally incapable of understanding the situation).⁴

Sexual violence can affect anyone, regardless of age, race, ethnicity, religion, (dis)ability, gender, sexuality, or sexual orientation.

Specifically, [sexual] violence **against children**⁵ consists of "[a range of sexual acts against a child](#), including but not limited to child sexual abuse, incest, rape, sexual violence in the context of dating/intimate relationships, sexual exploitation, online sexual abuse, and non-contact sexual abuse".⁶

While girls are particularly vulnerable to sexual violence, **boys are also widely affected**. For example, studies estimate that between 7% and 12% of boys worldwide report experiencing child sexual abuse.⁷

In CAR, although the data is not exhaustive due to a general lack of reporting,⁸ reporting from the first half of 2024 summarises a "**list includ[ing] 438 men and boys, [representing] 4% of survivors [with data showing that boys] are more vulnerable than these figures show** due to fear of stigmatisation and the lack of appropriate services for them".⁹

More specifically, in the first half of 2024, out of a total of 11,168 cases:

- 96% of GBV cases involved women (8,768 cases representing 79% of female survivors) and girls (2,400 cases representing 21% of female survivors); and

³ UNICEF and International Rescue Committee (IRC), [Caring for child survivors of sexual abuse – Guidelines](#), 2nd Edition, 2023, p. 28.

⁴ See for example, All Survivors Project, ['I Don't Know Who Can Help' Men and Boys facing Sexual Violence in Central African Republic](#), 14 February 2018, p.1.

⁵ In CAR, according to the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), which the country has ratified, "[...] a child means any human being under the age of eighteen, unless majority is attained earlier according to applicable law".

⁶ Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence against Children (OSRSG-VAC), website, "Building knowledge. Sexual violence".

⁷ UNICEF and International Rescue Committee (IRC), [Caring for child survivors of sexual abuse – Guidelines](#), 2nd Edition, 2023, p. 60.

⁸ GBV AoR Central African Republic, GBVIMS in the Central African Republic, [2022 Annual Report](#) [In French only], accessed 2023, p. 5; ASP, ['I Don't Know Who Can Help' Men and Boys facing Sexual Violence in Central African Republic](#), 14 February 2018.

⁹ GBV AoR Central African Republic, Gender-Based Violence Information Management System (GBVIMS) in the Central African Republic, January-June 2024.



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- 4% of GBV cases involved men (346 cases representing 79% of male survivors) and boys (92 cases representing 21% of male survivors).¹⁰

What characterises sexual violence against boys?

As with all cases of gender-based violence, **sexual violence against boys can take many forms**. Service providers at times focus solely on anal rape, neglecting other forms of sexual violence likely experienced by boys.¹¹

These forms may include:

- Anal, oral and attempted rape (with body parts or objects)
- Forced or coerced rape or other forms of sexual violence against others
- Forced marriage¹²
- Sexual exploitation
- Sexual slavery
- Forced sterilisation
- Forced anal examination
- Genital violence targeting the testicles and/or penis, including beating, crushing, burning, tying, cutting, electric shocks, forced circumcision and mutilation/castration
- Forced nudity, forced masturbation of oneself and others, and other forms of sexual humiliation
- Non-consensual touching of the genitals
- Forced witnessing (visual and auditory) of sexual violence against others
- Child sexual abuse online
- Exposure to pornography

Sexual violence against boys mentioned in research covering CAR¹³ includes acts committed by members of armed groups or other civilian actors (of all genders) within the conflict. Documented cases within and by armed forces and groups include:

- Individual and collective rape, sometimes repeated and prolonged, through the anus, mouth, and with body parts or objects (sticks, guns)
- Insertion of drugs into the anus "to make children stronger"
- Nudity and forced masturbation

¹⁰ GBV AoR Central African Republic, Gender-Based Violence Information Management System (GBVIMS) in the Central African Republic, January-June 2024, p. 6.

¹¹ GBV AoR, [Guidance to Gender-Based Violence Coordinators Addressing the Needs of Male Survivors of Sexual Violence in GBV Coordination](#), 2021, p. 4; Women's Refugee Commission (WRC), [Addressing Sexual Violence against Men, Boys, and LGBTIQ+ Persons in Humanitarian Settings](#), 2021, p. 2.

¹² UNICEF, website, "An estimated 115 million boys and men around the world were married as children, UNICEF said today in its first-ever in-depth analysis of child marriage. Among them, 1 in 5 children, or 23 million, married before the age of 15", 7 June 2019.

¹³ This research includes reports by ASP (2018), UNHCR & ASP (2018), OSRSG-CAAC (2022), UNICEF (2019), and the 2011, 2016, 2017, 2018 and 2019 UN Reports on Children in Conflict and Sexual Violence, mentioned in the reference list.



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- Forced circumcision¹⁴
- Torture of sexual organs
- Forced testimony of sexual acts or sexual violence
- Forced touching of other males in public
- Forced rape of others (e.g. other inmates) and sometimes members of their own family

"When research participants mentioned violence perpetrated by armed groups or forces, it was either during attacks or arrests (e.g. at roadblocks). They included rape (sometimes repeated) and torture resulting in serious injuries or death. They also included cases of boys forced to witness or commit rape against other boys, or against family members and included references to the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) taking boys and forcing them at gunpoint to have sex with their sister."

(Focus group meeting, Zemio, June 2022)¹⁵

In the communities and internally displaced persons camps,¹⁶ cases mentioned included:

- Sexual exploitation (for money or food)
- Sexual acts without consent
- Touching sensitive parts
- Viewing pornographic videos
- Forced testimony of sexual acts
- Taking photos of sexual organs
- Forced marriages to older women

Despite the limited research that exists on child marriage among boys, a UNICEF study revealed that this violation is widespread in several countries around the world and that, according to the data, CAR has the highest prevalence of child marriage among males in the world (28%).¹⁷

Which boys are most affected by sexual violence?

While boys can suffer sexual violence in a wide range of contexts, some are particularly vulnerable. These include boys with disabilities,¹⁸ boys with diverse sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression and sex characteristics (SOGIESC)¹⁹ including in places where homosexuality is not criminalised, boys from ethnic and religious minorities, and boys who are migrants and refugees.²⁰

¹⁴ All Survivors Project, ['I Don't Know Who Can Help' Men and Boys facing Sexual Violence in Central African Republic](#), 14 February 2018, p. 24.

¹⁵ OSRSG-CAAC, [Responding to conflict-related sexual violence against boys associated with armed forces and armed groups in reintegration programmes](#), 2022, p.45.

¹⁶ These cases were mentioned by participants in the research conducted by ASP as an implementation partner of OSRSG-CAAC in 2022 in CAR (on file with ASP).

¹⁷ UNICEF, [115 million boys and men around the world married as children](#), 7 June 2019.

¹⁸ According to WRC (2021, p. 33), children with disabilities are almost three times more likely to be victims of SV.

¹⁹ At the time of writing, there are at least two organisations in Bangui that provide support services. These include protection and health referrals to adults of diverse SOGIESC who have experienced sexual and other violence, in CAR. No information is available on children of diverse SOGIESC who may have the same need for services.

²⁰ GBV AoR, [Guidance to Gender-Based Violence Coordinators Addressing the Needs of Male Survivors of Sexual Violence in GBV Coordination](#), 2021, p. 4-6.



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In CAR, participants in the ASP research for OSRSG-CAAC in 2022 highlighted a **greater vulnerability for boys with no protection** such as orphans, unsupervised children from low-income families, children forced to work outside the home, children in internally displaced persons camps, children doing domestic chores, boys associated with armed forces and groups, street children, incarcerated children, or boys of a religion or origin considered as the "enemy". Added to this are separated and unaccompanied children, children taken in or entrusted to someone's care, children placed in institutions and foster families, and children experiencing the worst forms of child labour.

Who perpetrates sexual violence against boys?

In humanitarian settings, particularly in conflict situations, sexual violence can be perpetrated by armed leaders and actors (armed forces, groups, or affiliates), peacekeeping forces, humanitarian workers, local and government authorities, and influential community members (including religious and customary leaders) to assert their power or satisfy their sexual desires. As in peacetime, community and family members can also be perpetrators of sexual violence against boys.

The main known perpetrators are adult men. Other children, particularly older boys, may also commit sexual violence against younger boys.²¹ Finally, adult women are also known to commit sexual violence against boys. This is the case in CAR, where women were mentioned several times as perpetrators of sexual violence against boys during the research conducted by ASP in 2018 and 2022.

Where and in what environments does sexual violence against boys happen?

Boys are vulnerable to sexual violence in many circumstances including the following: in cases of detention, in internally displaced persons camps or refugee camps, along migration routes, at border crossings and checkpoints, in the context of their association with armed forces or groups, in institutional environments and in their communities or homes.

During the CAR conflict, sexual violence against men and boys has been used to terrorise and humiliate "enemies", and in some cases, as revenge for attacks by opposing armed groups. There are also opportunistic incidents of sexual violence against men and boys made possible by the country's lawlessness and the resulting impunity for criminal acts.²²

"[S]exual violence in CAR goes way beyond the conflict. In Tongolo, MSF's data shows that around 40% of the perpetrators were armed, while more than half of the nearly 13,000 survivors knew their aggressor or aggressors. In Bria, 25% of the attackers were armed and 80% of the survivors knew the attacker."²³

²¹ GBV AoR, [Guidance to Gender-Based Violence Coordinators Addressing the Needs of Male Survivors of Sexual Violence in GBV Coordination](#), 2021, p. 4-6; WRC, [Addressing Sexual Violence against Men, Boys, and LGBTIQ+ Persons in Humanitarian Settings](#), 2021, p. 33.

²² ASP, ['I Don't Know Who Can Help' Men and Boys facing Sexual Violence in Central African Republic](#), 14 February 2018.

²³ Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF), [Invisible Wounds: MSF's findings on sexual violence in CAR between 2018 and 2022](#), 24 October 2023, p. 11.



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In general, boys may be at high risk of sexual abuse within their own families. An overview of studies carried out in 21 countries revealed that between 3% and 29% of men reported having been victims of sexual violence during childhood, particularly within their family circle.²⁴

Boys can also be particularly vulnerable to sexual violence in conflict situations. Cases of conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV) against boys were reported by the UN from 2006 to 2023 in at least 17 countries: Afghanistan, Burundi, CAR, Colombia, Côte d'Ivoire, Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Haiti, Iraq, Israel, Libya, Myanmar, Nigeria, Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan, Syria, and Yemen.²⁵

The gender dimension of sexual violence against boys

Girls and boys do not always share the same risk factors, experiences of sexual violence or barriers to accessing services. In addition, the short- and long-term impacts of sexual violence can differ. Cultural beliefs and stereotypes based on context also play a significant role in these differences.²⁶

Gender-specific aspects of sexual violence against boys

Based on UNICEF & International Rescue Committee (IRC), [Caring for child survivors of sexual abuse – Guidelines](#), 2nd Edition, 2023, p. 37-38.

Sexual violence against boys can affect their masculine identity (and is sometimes perpetrated specifically for this reason).

It can have the following effect on a boy:

- Seeing themselves as less than a male (often through "emasculatation")
- Concerns about feeling powerless and thus flawed
- Fear (often related to stigma) of being labelled as homosexual

On the other hand, gender norms may perpetuate beliefs that any sexual activity is appropriate for men. Particularly if experiencing abuse from a female perpetrator, both the boys themselves and service providers may view this abuse as "less damaging" or even as a neutral or positive experience.

Finally, gender norms that prize self-reliance and "strength" for men and boys often leads to boys avoiding seeking external help for issues such as child sexual abuse; and gender norms might suggest that this behaviour shows weakness.

For these reasons, boys (especially adolescents) may be less likely to disclose and/or talk about their experiences of sexual violence.

Attitudes and myths preventing the reporting of sexual violence against boys in CAR ²⁷

According to participants in the ASP research implemented for OSRSG-CAAC in 2022, the underreporting of sexual violence against boys in CAR and the silence surrounding the issue can be

²⁴ UNICEF and International Rescue Committee (IRC), [Caring for child survivors of sexual abuse – Guidelines](#), 2nd Edition, 2023, p. 28.

²⁵ See the Secretary-General's reports on children and armed conflict between 2006 and 2023.

²⁶ UNICEF and IRC, [Caring for child survivors of sexual abuse – Guidelines](#), 2nd Edition, 2023, p.35.

²⁷ Based on OSRSG-CAAC, 2022, p. 40-42 ; UNICEF & IRC, 2023, p. 61-62 ; European Commission, 2018, p. 24.



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explained mainly by **cultural shame and stigma** associated with sexual violence against boys. As one participant put it, " It is a very, very, very, very, very delicate subject".²⁸

Indeed, many participants in this research considered "that sexual abuse against boys is more shameful for them than it is for girl victims/survivors".²⁹ They explained that violence against women is so widespread in Central African society that sexual violence against women is perceived as an ordinary reality. Consequently, there is a perception that people are more willing to accept girls who have survived sexual violence than boys.

As a result of these perceptions, surviving boys may be accused, marginalised, mocked, humiliated, intimidated, punished, or banished from their communities or families. Therefore, surviving boys (and sometimes their family members) may experience strong feelings of shame and/or guilt.

"Even when both boys and girls are raped (but you won't hear of the boys) in the family, it's a secret."
(Member of a Survivors' Association, Bangui 2022)³⁰

Several beliefs support this phenomenon in CAR:

- The belief that men and boys must be strong, and often stronger than women. This can result in beliefs that they should not complain about any violence, particularly sexual violence, they might have experienced. This belief is arguably stronger in cases where the perpetrator was a woman.

"Boys are raised to be strong, not to complain or cry, and withstanding discomfort and pain is evidence of their manhood."
(Local NGO staff, Bangui 2022)³¹

- The perceived complicity of survivors of violence perpetrated by armed groups in the sexual violence they have experienced. These survivors are often also perceived as being aligned with the enemy.
- The belief that boys who experience sexual violence perpetrated by a man or another boy have lost their masculinity. Boys in these cases may be perceived as having "behaved like a girl" or as having "become homosexual", considered particularly shameful in CAR.
- The perception that boys could not experience sexual violence perpetrated by a woman. This often stems from a belief that men are known to "force" women but that the opposite could not be true.
- A desire for or perception that children will "forget" their experience and avoid traumatising if parents do not address their experience. When coupled with the fear of becoming an outsider through stigmatisation, this belief leads families to remain silent

²⁸ OSRSG-CAAC, [Responding to conflict-related sexual violence against boys associated with armed forces and armed groups in reintegration programmes](#), 2022, p.34.

²⁹ OSRSG-CAAC, [Responding to conflict-related sexual violence against boys associated with armed forces and armed groups in reintegration programmes](#), 2022, p.34.

²⁷ OSRSG-CAAC, [Responding to conflict-related sexual violence against boys associated with armed forces and armed groups in reintegration programmes](#), 2022, p. 36.

²⁸ OSRSG-CAAC, [Responding to conflict-related sexual violence against boys associated with armed forces and armed groups in reintegration programmes](#), 2022, p. 35.



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about sexual violence against boys, and to report it only when faced with physical consequences and medical needs.

Identification and disclosure³²

Despite the serious and lasting health-related consequences of sexual violence against boys, the report “Caring for child survivors of sexual abuse – Guidelines” explains that boys are unlikely to seek out services.³³ Most will not seek help for years, and those who do act immediately tend to do so when physical impacts require urgent care.³⁴

Fear that confidentiality is not guaranteed is a key factor that prevents reporting within the justice and health systems.

(Group discussion, Zémio 2022)³⁵

Evidence shows that when boys seek support related to sexual violence, they often do so differently than others. Although further research is needed, studies suggest that boy survivors may use euphemisms or allude to sexual violence rather than stating it directly, saying for example, “you can't imagine what they do, they gave me a pain that I can't forget”.³⁶ Survivors may also show unexplained aggression, or a desire for revenge against perpetrators.

“It takes a lot of courage for a male to disclose their situation” was a frequent remark. A respondent spoke about a training she facilitated in Bangui where a man brought his 12-year-old son; they did not identify themselves and left without further support.

(Member of a Survivors’ Association, Bangui 2022)³⁷

Furthermore, in addition to shame and stigma, in situations of conflict, occupation, and failure of the justice system, boy victims/survivors and their families may fear reprisals from community members and perpetrators in the event of disclosure, particularly if the latter occupy a position of power.

Finally, in CAR, most GBV services are focused mainly on women and girls, resulting in certain exclusions of men and boys (through the names on services which identify them as being only for women and girls, reduced access to counseling, availability of kits and other equipment, and the types of help offered).³⁸

²⁹ The term “disclosure” means the child reveals or makes known their experience of sexual violence. This act is sometimes referred to as “signalement” or “rapportage” (reporting), both of which imply a procedural step.

“Disclosure” does not necessarily imply that the child denounces the perpetrator(s).

³³ UNICEF and IRC, [Caring for child survivors of sexual abuse – Guidelines](#), 2nd Edition, 2023, p. 71-72.

³¹ GBV AoR, [Guidance to Gender-Based Violence Coordinators Addressing the Needs of Male Survivors of Sexual Violence in GBV Coordination](#), 2021, p. 6.

³² OSRSG-CAAC, [Responding to conflict-related sexual violence against boys associated with armed forces and armed groups in reintegration programmes](#), 2022 p. 37.

³³ WRC, [Addressing Sexual Violence against Men, Boys, and LGBTIQ+ Persons in Humanitarian Settings](#), 2021, p. 34.

³⁴ OSRSG-CAAC, [Responding to conflict-related sexual violence against boys associated with armed forces and armed groups in reintegration programmes](#), 2022, p. 36.

³⁸ See UNHCR & ASP, Summary report on file with ASP of the international workshop “Implementing a prevention and response framework for sexual violence against men and boys in the Central African Republic” Bangui, Central African Republic, 10-11 April 2018.



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GBV AoR identified potential disclosure points for surviving boys: family members including siblings, peers and friends, health centres or hospitals, teachers, caregivers, social workers responsible for child protection cases, reintegration services for children associated with armed forces and groups, child-friendly spaces, child helplines, community centres and recreation services, youth centres and programmes and religious leaders.³⁹

Various discussions facilitated by ASP in CAR⁴⁰ have highlighted methods to improve access to safe services for men and boys:

- Ensure that all sexual violence response services are more inclusive of boys and men (for example by increasing the number of disclosure points in existing services and guaranteeing survivors the choice of male or female practitioners and service staff);
- Ensure that information, education and communication (IEC) materials on preventing and responding to sexual violence are gender-inclusive and accessible to all; and
- Ensure that specific psychological and psychosocial support is developed to meet the needs of male survivors of sexual violence.

Child protection workers and other related services must:

- Be trained to identify non-verbal cues and other indications of sexual violence against boys;
- Understand the importance of trust-building processes with each child;
- Be aware of how prejudicial beliefs can affect a boy's willingness to disclose his experience of sexual violence; and
- Be sensitive to the issue of gender norms in addressing the problem.

Those involved in child protection and other related services should:

- ✓ Acknowledge that boys can experience sexual violence;
- ✓ Recognise that sexual violence against boys can take many forms in conflict settings, including genital violence such as castration and penile amputation, and forced rape of others;
- ✓ Understand and address mistaken beliefs such as that sexual abuse causes homosexuality; these mistaken beliefs carry additional stigma and may make it more difficult for boys abused by an adult male to disclose;
- ✓ Recognise that boy victims/survivors should be offered a choice of a male or female service provider;
- ✓ Recognise the internal (individual) and external (social) barriers to receiving care including for example stigmatisation related to victimisation, masculinity, and the fear of being labelled homosexual;
- ✓ Recognise that criminalisation of homosexuality increases the fear of seeking services and the chances of facing legal consequences should the abuse become widely known or reported to legal authorities; and

³⁶ GBV AoR, [Guidance to Gender-Based Violence Coordinators Addressing the Needs of Male Survivors of Sexual Violence in GBV Coordination](#), 2021, p. 7.

⁴⁰ See the 2018 brainstorming workshop by UNHCR and ASP, on file with ASP, and ASP's research with OSRSG-CAAC in 2022.



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- ✓ Accept that boy survivors of sexual violence have the same needs for care, support and treatment as other survivors, including feeling safe, cared for, believed, encouraged and assured that seeking help and/or acknowledging sexual violence is the right thing to do.

Source: UNICEF and IRC, [Caring for child survivors of sexual abuse – Guidelines](#), 2023 p. 37-38.

Approaches for a Safe Response

Key Considerations⁴¹

Every context is different.

- There is no universal model that works for every situation.
- It is important to understand (specific to each context) how and when boys disclose their experiences of sexual violence, how they seek help and their service delivery preferences.
- Circumstances are constantly evolving, sometimes unpredictably. This requires ongoing assessment and adjustment of approaches to care and support.

Boy victims/survivors have specific needs for treatment and support which must be met by service providers who are properly trained and able to offer survivor-centred, non-stigmatising and non-discriminatory care.

- All staff likely to be in contact with survivors should be sensitised to and trained on the subject of sexual violence against boys. This includes child protection workers, support workers for GBV survivors⁴² and referral service workers.
- Standard operating procedures dedicated to child sexual abuse should be based on a thorough analysis of the differential needs of all genders and should provide detailed guidelines on how to respond in difficult scenarios.
- It is important to consider specific responses for each individual and all genders, for example when developing dignity kits or when providing choice in the gender of staff responsible for follow-up care with victims/survivors.

Efforts must be coordinated to ensure effective, safe and confidential guidance for boys.

- Clinical services for rape and sexual assault must be accessible and meet the needs of boy victims/survivors.
- Guidance must be established through reliable referral systems between relevant actors, regularly evaluated, and updated according to results and changing environments.
- A mapping of services should be realised and regularly updated. This map should indicate entry points accessible to boys and include child protection organisations as well as the other actors involved.

³⁹ Based on UNHCR & ASP 2018, OSRSG-CAAC 2022, Kiss & al 2020, GV AoR 2021, ECPAT International 2023, UNICEF & IRC 2023, European Commission 2018.

⁴⁰ A review of studies of male survivors of sexual abuse as children indicates that negative reactions from service providers when men disclose sexual abuse are directly associated with negative effects on health behaviors, which may in turn reinforce the perception that help is unavailable or that "talking is not safe" (Kiss & al 2020, p. 10; GBV AoR 2021, p. 5; ECPAT International 2023).



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Children must be informed about the subject of sexual violence, related services, as well as how to access them.

- Sexual violence as a subject should be addressed sensitively and safely with children and young people in spaces where they study, play and generally interact.
- Children must be instructed on the subject by trained professionals who are well-informed on how to approach sexual violence conversations with children.

Families should be involved in supporting boy victims.

- To reduce stigma, family support can be particularly beneficial for child survivors of sexual violence. However, families should never be informed of their child's experience of sexual violence without the child's consent. Therefore, child protection stakeholders, actors supporting GBV survivors and social workers should support children in thinking about the benefits and risks of disclosure to their families. If the child decides to disclose, they should be supported in doing so.
- When a child consents to family involvement, support and advice should be provided to help families support their child's reintegration. This can include raising awareness of adolescence's social and emotional components, reinforcing positive parenting practices, supporting the child's mental health, and bolstering psychosocial support.

Raising awareness in and engagement with communities is necessary regarding both sexual violence against boys and access to gender-inclusive services.

- Community members must be engaged sensitively in dialog around beliefs and misconceptions that harm survivors and those around them. This requires context-specific community engagement through survivors' associations and other legitimised actors.
- Boys must be respectfully and confidentially included when developing communication and public information campaigns.

Key Messages

Are boys affected by sexual violence?

Sexual violence can affect anyone. While girls are particularly vulnerable to sexual violence, boys are also widely affected. In CAR, "men and boys represent 4% of survivors and are more vulnerable than these figures show".⁴³ There is much more data to be learned.

What characterises sexual violence against boys?

Sexual violence against boys can take many forms. Sometimes, service providers focus solely on anal rape, whereas boys can experience many other forms of sexual violence. In CAR, the subject of sexual violence against boys is highly sensitive due to under-disclosure, an issue that exacerbates the phenomenon and social norms that stigmatise sexual violence against boys.

Which boys are most affected by sexual violence?

While all boys can suffer sexual violence, some are particularly vulnerable. In CAR, boys without family or community protection are more vulnerable, as well as boys in families made vulnerable by a lack of access to basic social services (including education and health).

⁴³ GBVIMS, accessed 2024.



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Who perpetrates sexual violence against boys?

In humanitarian settings, particularly in conflict situations, sexual violence can be perpetrated by armed actors (armed forces and groups), peacekeeping forces, humanitarian workers, local and government authorities and influential community members (including religious and customary leaders) to assert their power or satisfy their sexual desires.

Where and in what environment does sexual violence against boys happen?

Boys are vulnerable to sexual violence in many circumstances, including: in cases of detention, in internally displaced persons camps or refugee camps, along migration routes, at border crossings and checkpoints, in the context of their association with armed forces or groups, in institutional environments and in their communities or homes.

The gender dimension of to sexual violence against boys

Sexual violence against boys can affect their masculine identity; norms surrounding masculinity may prevent boys from seeking help. For these reasons, boys (and particularly adolescents) may be less likely to disclose their experiences of sexual violence.

The failure to report cases of sexual violence against boys in CAR along with the silence surrounding this subject can be largely explained by cultural shame and stigma associated with these experiences.

Identification and disclosure

Providers of child protection, GBV and other related services must be aware of how beliefs, social norms and stigmas can affect a boy's willingness to disclose his experience.

These services must be trained in the key issues regarding case management of boy victims/survivors. This includes identifying non-verbal and other indications of sexual violence and trauma against boys.

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