Engaging Men and Boys as Actors in the Prevention of Child Sexual Abuse and Exploitation

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Why this focus?
Preventing the sexual abuse and exploitation of children means moving from an almost exclusive focus on responses for victims (that describes much of the work to date), to expand and include efforts aimed at stopping violence being perpetrated in the first instance. To achieve this, Oak Foundation has chosen to allocate significant resources to work that focuses on men and boys. This is premised on our understanding that:

- sexual violence is widespread, across all societies and predominantly perpetrated by men;
- prevention of sexual violence cannot simply rely on empowering victims or potential victims or responding once the abuse has taken place; and
- addressing the use of and tolerance of sexual violence is an issue for the whole of society.

The Foundation has identified certain priority approaches to take forward this work. The strategic objectives for the coming years have been defined as:

i. men and boys will have greater opportunities to engage positively in children’s lives and to protect them from sexual abuse;
ii. the incidence of sexual abuse and levels of recidivism will be reduced; and
iii. boys and girls will respect each other for their different and equally valuable contributions to families and communities.

Prevalence
While acknowledging that sexual violence is under–reported, there is a growing body of evidence about men’s use of violence against women, based on data elicited from female victims and directly from men. This clearly indicates both that men’s use of violence, including sexual violence, is widespread and that the majority of perpetrators of sexual violence are male. Pioneering work undertaken in South Africa developed and piloted survey tools that directly questioned men about their behaviour. This research found that 20% of the male population surveyed reported behaviour

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2 Rachel Jewkes et al. (2009), Understanding Men’s Health and Use of Violence: Interface of Rape and HIV in South Africa.
that amounted to rape.\(^3\) Similar figures about the rates of perpetration of sexual violence have also been found in recent work by the Partners4Prevention programme in South and South East Asia,\(^4\) and in the large scale IMAGE surveys undertaken in eight countries.\(^5\) Rates varied between countries and within countries, but in all contexts, large numbers of men acknowledge their own and other men’s use of violence against women.

Much of the work on sexual violence has been undertaken by those involved in stopping violence against women and much of the data relates to the use of violence against “women”, though often this does not specify the ages of the victims. In many contexts, the term women will encompass older children, particularly adolescent girls.

The issue of the use and tolerance of violence is a question of who has power. The use of violence against a female partner is often replicated or translates into the use of violence against others considered less powerful, especially where such behaviour is condoned or accepted by significant sections of society or communities. Where the victims of violence are children, especially female children, then power is related to both age and gender, both of which correlate negatively with power and status in many societies.

Clearly then, a focus on men is essential if the aim is the prevention of sexual violence.

The data also shows that age, i.e. youth is a risk factor in the perpetration of sexual violence. Partners4Prevention found that 50% of perpetrators, committed acts of sexual violence for the first time while they were teenagers.\(^6\) This confirmed earlier findings from the work in South Africa. It is also reflected in the statistics on known sex offenders. Finkelhor reports that about a third of known sex offenders are children.\(^7\) Hackett reports a similar figure for recorded sexual offences in parts of the UK.\(^8\)

The data that has been generated over the past decade, from diverse social and cultural contexts, clearly indicates that the focus of violence prevention work must include work targeting men and boys’ beliefs, attitudes and behaviour. But the question of how to encourage, sustain and accelerate changes in these entrenched patterns, is much less well understood or documented. This paper will explore what Oak Foundation and others have been learning about effective practice, highlighting emerging promising practices, and noting where there are continuing significant gaps in the evidence.

\(^3\) Jewkes et al. (2009).
\(^4\) Fulu, Warner, Miedema, Jewkes, Roselli and Lang (2013); Why Do Some Men Use Violence Against Women and How Can we Prevent It?
\(^5\) Gary Barker, Manuel Contreras, Brian Heilman, Ajay Singh, Ravi Verma, Marcos Nascimento (2011); Evolving Men; Initial Results from the International Men and Gender Equality Survey (IMAGES).
\(^6\) Fulu et al. (2013).
What do we understand about the risk factors around perpetration of sexual violence?

While there are gaps in the sector’s knowledge, there is some understanding of the factors that make it more likely that someone will become a perpetrator of sexual violence. Reviews of available evidence undertaken by the Sexual Violence Research Initiative, and the Partners4Prevention programme in Asia highlight:

- a strong association of men’s use of sexual violence and their own experience of violence in childhood (as victims and/or witnesses);\(^9,10\)
- strong gender inequitable norms and attitudes.\(^11\) This is seen by some as the predominant risk cluster, both at a structural and an individual level – i.e. what individuals think about how they should behave and how society’s are structured and maintained in relation to power and relationships; and
- age – half of men that perpetrate rape did so for the first time as juveniles.\(^12\) Sexual violence is also associated with other forms of “delinquent” behaviour particularly among young perpetrators, including the use of weapons, and the use of alcohol. In some ways all of these are connected to certain views of masculinity and attitudes towards gender.

In many cases, it is clear that the risks of becoming a perpetrator and the risks of becoming a victim of sexual violence are the same.

Risk factors for being a perpetrator include low education, exposure to child maltreatment or witnessing violence in the family, harmful use of alcohol, attitudes accepting of violence and gender inequality.

Risk factors for being a victim of intimate partner and sexual violence include low education, witnessing violence between parents, exposure to abuse during childhood and attitudes accepting violence and gender inequality.\(^13\)

In particular, children who experience or witness violence in the family are more likely to be victims (and more likely to perpetrate violence). There may well be a gender dimension to this, with boys more likely to become perpetrators than girls, and girls more likely to be victims than boys, though under-reporting suggests the need for considerable caution around such statements.

Men in the Partners4Prevention study frequently reported experiences of abuse in childhood. These were associated with a number of serious consequences, including later perpetration. It also

\(^10\) Fulu et al. (2013).
\(^12\) Jewkes et al. (2009).
correlated with depression, low life satisfaction, poor health, gang membership, being involved in other forms of violence, alcohol and drug use and the use of transactional sex. ¹⁴

The link between experience of sexual abuse as a child and later perpetration is complex. It needs to take account of gender and the presence or absence of protective factors. Hackett suggests that exposure to a number of interacting stressors/difficulties is much more significant than any one experience, including being a victim of sexual abuse. ¹⁵

The idea or “myth” that sex offenders are or were all victims of sexual abuse has been challenged. ¹⁶ Different figures for prevalence have been generated using self–report mechanisms (where more than 66% claimed to have been sexually abused) and those using polygraph testing (which suggested about 29%, more in line with population figures in general) – indicating some over–reporting by offenders.

Is male violence a biological inevitability? Clearly not. The majority of men, (around 80% according to the previously cited survey work undertaken by Jewkes and others) are not perpetrators of extreme forms of sexual violence. But, a significant percentage of the make population do perpetrate sexual violence. Efforts to prevent such violence from happening must address both the risk factors that operate at the level of the individual, and those that work at a societal or structural level. This includes challenging the acceptance or tolerance of the use of violence, understanding more about the risk factors and how they operate, and identifying and expanding ways in which these risks can be effectively reduced, at both individual and structural levels. Different interventions and programmes operating at the individual and structural level, may complement, reinforce and thus accelerate or sustain change, but while this seems to be a realistic assumption, there is little documented evidence of these inter–relationships.

It is also important to understand, build on and reinforce the norms, attitudes and beliefs of those who do not use, condone or tolerate sexual violence, to harness the “positive deviance” to influence and change individual beliefs and societal norms.

In both strands of work, it is essential that the impact is evaluated. Given the challenges and potential of this work, the need to build or strengthen the evidence, of what works, in which contexts, on what issues, is critical in informing future developments. It is important that projects/programmes make explicit use of available data and specifically test out promising models, and/or develop, implement and rigorously test out innovations. There is a real and continuing gap in the evidence of long term impact, particularly as it relates to demonstrable and sustained changes in behaviour. It is essential that such evidence takes account of both the voice of the perpetrator or past or potential perpetrator, and the voice of the victim and the wider society, to help determine if and when real change happens.

¹⁴ Fulu et al. (2013).
¹⁵ Simon Hackett (2004).
The recent survey work that has generated national level data on incidence, provides an opportunity to see if planned work really does have an impact on the rate of sexual violence in the future, i.e. does the rate of sexual violence go down?. This requires a commitment to and investment in understanding the results, learning, and adapting and evolving programmes in light of those results.

**Connecting learning and research on Violence against Children and Violence against Women**

As previously noted, data on the incidence of violence and use of sexual violence, rarely distinguishes the age of the victim. While child sexual abuse covers a range of abusive behaviour, often the data on intimate partner violence and statistics on rape of a non-partner will in reality include instances of sexual and other forms of violence against those under 18, i.e. children. Such a claim is reinforced by the recent surveys that highlight the youth of many of the perpetrators of violence.

It is also important to note the possible link between violence against women, intimate partner violence and the use or acceptance of violence against children. Ideas about male dominance, and the normalization of the use of physical strength and violence to maintain that dominance, may well be reflected in attitudes towards the control, and subjugation of children through the use of violence.

This may be overlain with beliefs around the place of children in society, where parents are able, or even encouraged, to use physical violence to “maintain” discipline and demonstrate adult superiority and control.

In relation to how such violence is perceived, especially sexual violence, it is clear that opinions, key reference groups and key influencers will vary across different parts of society. These are also linked to diverging perspectives about childhood, the appropriate age for the onset of sexual activity, attitudes towards early marriage etc.

The data from SVRI and Partners4Prevention clearly demonstrates the link between childhood exposure to violence and risks of becoming a perpetrator (and of becoming a victim of violence in later life). This individual experience and the attitudes and behaviours that result from it, form part of the complex interplay of factors that contribute to, or protect from, subsequent abusive patterns of behaviour. The link between exposure to violence in childhood and later use of violence, suggests that work explicitly aimed at promoting better parenting, strengthening parent–child attachments, and supporting the use of non–violent forms of discipline in the home, could play a part in reducing the later incidence of violence. SVRI are currently supporting work in East Africa aimed at testing out if and how support for better parenting can reduce the current and subsequent use of violence.17

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17 [http://www.svri.org/primaryprevention.htm](http://www.svri.org/primaryprevention.htm)
Reducing the risks of perpetration of sexual violence through understanding and challenging social and structural norms, and the individual attitudes and behaviour that perpetuates sexual violence

The recent surveys undertaken in a number of different countries and contexts, using rigorous tools and analytic frameworks\(^\text{18}\) have highlighted a number of common societal factors associated with the perpetration of violence. Intimate partner violence is strongly associated with gender inequity at both the individual level, and in terms of the dominant norms shared by men and women. According to Rachel Jewkes, this is the predominant factor determining the use of and attitudes towards sexual violence.

Social norms theory suggests that for behaviour to change, it is necessary to understand and focus on changing dominant social norms rather than seeking to generate change through challenging individual’s attitudes and beliefs. It is not enough to try to influence an individual’s attitudes and beliefs through for example, information about children’s rights, the age of childhood etc.

Understanding more about norms, how they operate and thus how they might be changed, is a key element in framing future work. Social norms operate in, and influence virtually all of the situations faced by communities because “social norms condition (and in many cases dictate) the behaviour of individuals – of children, parents and the society surrounding them…. Norms are particularly important for addressing situations of violence, including exploitation and abuse against children and women, as these are primarily the result of social interactions.”\(^\text{19}\)

> A social norm is a perception of where a social group is or where the social group ought to be on some dimension of attitude or behaviour. This definition identifies two major types of social norms. One type of social norm is a descriptive norm, or is the perception of where the group is. A descriptive norm identifies the typical attitudes or behaviours of the group. The second type is an injunctive norm, or the perception of where the group ought to be. An injunctive norm identifies the desirable attitudes or behaviours of a group. Descriptive and injunctive norms imply a certain kind of social consensus.\(^\text{20}\)

Social norms interplay with individual characteristics, and are affirmed by other experiences or challenged by protective and positive elements within the individual, family and environment. Negative norms can be maintained and reinforced through the behaviour associated with them – for example maintaining the power and status differentials based on gender and age that are seen to

\(^{18}\) Including the IMAGE study, Partners4Prevention and SVRI.


\(^{20}\) Elizabeth Levy Paluck and Laurie Ball (2010), Social norms marketing aimed at gender based violence; conducted for the International Rescue Committee.
benefit men and boys can be supported by their lack of engagement in what are perceives as female work, including positive parenting and protecting children. These all contribute to a distorted and limited vision of masculinity, based on power, strength, control etc. They can contribute to the normalizing of sexual violence, the use of sexual aggression and a sense of male entitlement. As an example, the Partners4Prevention surveys found that extreme forms of sexual violence, rape, was most commonly associated with a sense of sexual entitlement; reported by 70 – 80% of those who had raped.

Such norms may be maintained because of the absence of positive alternatives. If no–one, or no–one of influence, challenges these pervasive negative norms, then the assumption is that such views are supported by “everyone”, even though many individuals may actually hold different views that they choose to suppress.

Changing these norms and the behaviours associated with them is not easy. It inevitably requires a range of interventions, and different entry points or targets, aimed at generating discussions and reflection, challenging some of the dominant structural and social norms, articulating and making some of the divergent views more visible.

Some of the most widely reported and well documented work on changing social norms, has been FGM or FGC. 21 This has involved a process of community dialogue, sharing information, highlighting alternative views, and enlisting the support and engagement of key influencers or champions. The same approach is being used in challenging aspects of norms around masculinity and gender. Men Care22 and their global fatherhood campaign, (including work that Oak Foundation is supporting in Bulgaria and Switzerland) highlight positive alternative versions of men and fatherhood.

Such efforts need to build on the fact that the vast majority of men do not use sexual violence. The results of the surveys in Asia found significant numbers of men expressed frustration and concern about the negative but dominant notions of what it means to be a man. Others have already found ways of behaving that embodies gender equity and power sharing. Understanding more might lead to identifying possible opportunities and entry points for the difficult task of changing something so entrenched.

To be effective, women’s attitudes may also need to be challenged. Partenrs4Prevention included women in their surveys, and found that they tended to be more conservative and gender inequitable than their male counterparts. As daughters, partners and mothers, these attitudes are crucially important in maintaining gender inequity.

The media can play an important role in reinforcing or challenging dominant norms. The ways in which gender roles are depicted in the media, how masculinity and femininity are portrayed, can

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have a major influence, particularly in relation to how children and young people think about and understand societal expectations. Given the power and influence of the many different forms of media to drive or reinforce negative stereotypes, there are also huge opportunities for more effectively using this power to challenge and change them, but also major barriers to doing so effectively and at scale. This requires good strategies, alliances that bring together different skills and entry points and training.

Transformational work needs to be seen as a process that generates a sustainable momentum, that is then “mutually–reinforced”. Once that critical momentum or tipping point is reached, there is a real prospect of men and women’s attitudes around gender norms and the behavioural and practical implications of such norms being irreversibly changed.

Work targeting norms has to be planned, strategic and well monitored. It needs to be carefully tracked to determine if and what is changing over time. It needs to be comprehensive, sequenced, and nuanced, to deal with particular issues or contexts. Broad based messages and scatter–gun methods of reaching people are liable to be off–target and off–message for many groups. Work that is currently underway in East Africa, looking at applying social norms theory to better understanding the structural drivers of HIV transmission, including sexual violence and sexual behaviour, is helping to gain much better insights into who are the key reference groups, key opinion formers and influencers, and pointing to a more targeted approach for work aimed at changing norms and behaviour. Such work offers critical insights into how to plan and implement effective communications, media and campaigning work.

**Applying social norms theory to violence prevention programme developments**

Social norms theory suggests that it may be more effective to understand and focus on changing social norms rather than individual attitudes. Social norms operate in, and influence virtually all of the situations faced by communities. They condition or dictate the behaviour of individuals. Targeting certain norms may be especially relevant “for addressing situations of violence, including exploitation and abuse against children and women, as these are primarily the result of social interactions.”

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23 See for example the work being supported through the Geena Davis Institute [http://www.thegeenadavisinstitute.org/index.php](http://www.thegeenadavisinstitute.org/index.php).
Oak Foundation and partners are interested in exploring how applying a social norms approach would facilitate and support a more nuanced, thoughtful and ultimately effective strategy for prevention of sexual violence, by changing the way that key influencers within the community think about such violence, and exert control over the behaviour of others through sanctions etc.

The benefits of this approach, ideally, are that changes in norms translate into real changes in behaviour, which are reinforced and maintained by peers and broader social structures. The available evidence suggests that norms correlate more strongly with behaviour change than do attitudes. They may provide a better “leading indicator” of whether programme is on track.28

This strategy has shown promising results in certain contexts – often cited examples are Project H29 and Stepping Stones,30 both of which have been rigorously evaluated, and have delivered change that has been sustained over time.

Oak currently has a small but growing number of partners working on changing inequitable and harmful gender norms. Often this is through community level work, (or group work plus an additional input, e.g. income generation, cash payments etc), with men and older boys, with information and reflection aimed at clarifying and challenging behaviour, attitudes and norms that maintain inequity and normalize violence.

Sonke’s work in Southern Africa, often delivered through community mobilization campaigns, has included generating discussion and reflection about the implications for men and women of the current stereotypes. They have run successful campaigns highlighting positive alternative male role model,31 to challenge stereotypes from within communities. In contexts of incredibly high rates of sexual violence, their work has contributed to an alternative vision of male norms, changing the accepted discourse about masculinity in some settings. While their work has been positively evaluated over short time spans, they are currently engaged in a longer term randomized control, that will assess if and how a community mobilization campaign contributes to changing behaviour, to reducing the levels of sexual violence in targeted communities, and subsequent reductions in the transmission of HIV to adolescent girls.32

28 Heise L. (2012) - ppt presentation from the STRIVE meeting.
29 Through a blend of group work, accompanied by radio announcements, billboards and dances, Promundo challenges traditional male attitudes by promoting the idea that it is ‘cool’ to be a more gender-equitable man.
31 One Man Can Campaign: http://saynotoviolence.org/join-say-no/one-man-can-campaign.
Reducing risks through school based interventions

Given the need to try to reach young people before they become perpetrators, suggests that programmes delivered in schools or alternative education settings may be effective.

The starting point for challenging and changing the gender norms, attitudes and beliefs among school–aged children, is understanding what they are currently, how they vary, and building strategies for challenging perceptions and norms that are problematic.

Research conducted in Bulgaria in 2012 by Gender Education, Research and Technologies Foundation\textsuperscript{33} surveyed 1600 children aged between nine and seventeen. Their report highlights a number of dimensions where children hold non–equitable attitudes and beliefs around gender. Children are influenced by their family and community attitudes and norms, plus also how such beliefs are reflected and reinforced through how men and women are depicted in the media. These socially determined stereotypes potentially impact a whole range of behaviour, and life opportunities for both boys and girls.

The school environment and the teaching that takes place there can empower, instruct and model gender equitable attitudes and behaviour. Schools can also reinforce harmful masculinities, reinforce abusive patterns of power and authority, and sustain a regime where victims are impotent and silenced. To influence the negative potential of schools, work needs to be done through teacher training etc.

Work with adolescents in schools (and in other non–formal education settings) has been developed through HIV prevention programmes, life skills development, and in situations of conflict and displacement. In all of these, there is an element of challenging gender inequitable attitudes and the normalization of violence and abuse. Learning from these different entry points can provide useful data for future developments.

Interventions aimed at preventing the use of sexual violence need to target boys before they perpetrate sexual violence and so must start and continue through all of the teenage years. Some interventions focus on high risk youth, but there are clearly some benefits of making these messages more widely available to young people who are not part of gangs or identified as delinquent.

Clearly, girls and young women are also part of society holding distorted views about gender and power, and can benefit from these programmes.

Changing or challenging attitudes and social norms needs to be more than a one–off lesson; Alan Grieg advocates for whole school approaches,\textsuperscript{34} which look at the whole culture of a school and how they can be adapted to reflect and support gender equitable, safe and respectful approaches. Example

\textsuperscript{33}http://www.gert.ngo-bg.org/en.
\textsuperscript{34}Instituto Promundo-US (2011), Toward a better future for this generation and the next: A report for the Oak Foundation on male engagement in the protection of children from child sexual abuse.

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he cites include the Raising Voices Good Schools programmes in Uganda, and the Safe Schools model. Raising Voices has and is being rigorously evaluated. FAWE in Tanzania have adapted and applied the model, delivering a programme aimed at increasing girls’ enrolment and retention in school that now includes both boys and girls in their Tuseme programme. In most programmes there is too little evidence about subsequent or sustained change in behaviour, though of course this does not in itself indicate an absence of impact. One of the questions raised by these examples is “the scale of inputs needed to bring about sustainable change”. This can probably only be answered through comparison across different types of intervention.

Evaluations of work in different settings are critical, to help understand what helps to sustain change, the impact of a supportive or challenging environment, critical age of interventions etc. While intuitively, we assume that a multi–pronged approach, which simultaneously works in schools, families and through the mass media with the larger community, will create synergies and make success more likely in each of the domains, there is little evidence as yet to support this.

One of the mainstream interventions that might be a vehicle for reducing the use of sexual violence is sex or sexuality education. While such programmes are widespread, their content and aims vary considerable. Internationally, clear guidance around content and delivery modalities has been developed, particularly in the context of their use as part of efforts aimed at HIV/AIDS prevention and response.

In many parts of the world, a combination of social taboos, unavailability of sound information, lack of resources and infrastructure make it difficult for children and young people to access sexuality education aimed at improving knowledge and reducing risk. This leaves many young people vulnerable to coercion, abuse, exploitation, unintended pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections, including HIV.

There have been a number of rigorous evaluations looking at the impact of sex education programmes. Many mainstream programmes focus on, and measure, risks around teenage pregnancy and sexual health. Comprehensive sex education programmes, (e.g. those that include physiology, relationships, typical experiences of early sex, contraception, parenthood, sexually transmitted infections (STIs), and skills for sexual negotiation, condom use and accessing local sexual health

35 http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3734010/.
37 In line with Alan Greg’s recommendations in Instituto Promundo-US (2011), Toward a better future for this generation and the next: A report for the Oak Foundation on male engagement in the protection of children from child sexual abuse.
services, and combine active learning and skills development)\(^{39}\) have demonstrated a range of impacts related to onset of sexual activity, reduction in the frequency of sexual activity, reductions in number of sexual partners, and increase in condom and contraceptive use. Programmes’ effectiveness has been demonstrated for youth from a variety of racial, cultural, and socioeconomic backgrounds,\(^{40}\) though most of the evaluations of this work have been undertaken in higher income countries. Though the majority of such programmes have been implemented in school settings, there is clearly scope for such work to be undertaken in less formal settings, with out of school children, with young workers, etc.

While these programmes show changes in behaviour relating to sexual activity, there are very few (perhaps none) that have measured changes in attitudes towards violence AND reductions in the use of sexual violence.

A lot of the studies aimed at challenging attitudes towards the use of sexual violence have again been undertaken with populations in the USA, and a few other high resource settings. Many have looked at changing attitudes towards “rape myths”;\(^{41}\) several studies have shown significant reductions in acceptance of these myths. All of the rigorously evaluated interventions looked at by Barker et al.\(^{42}\) involving information, reflection and discussion, etc., were of relatively short duration, some were delivered to single sex, same age groups, others to mixed sex, and/or mixed age groups.\(^{43}\) Few of these interventions have been rigorously evaluated in other countries or contexts. They may well be useful in many different settings, but the lack of evidence currently, makes it difficult to make claims about their universal utility and relevance at this moment in time.

**Translating changes in Knowledge and Attitudes to changes in behaviour**

There are very few long term evaluations of whether or not interventions aimed at challenging attitudes towards gender or age–related violence translate into changes in behaviour, which are sustained over time. There are methodological and ethical challenges in getting direct measurements around the perpetration of sexual violence, and thus difficulties in establishing current rates, (rather than official reported rates), that will help to measure change over time. One consequence has been an over–reliance on “attitude measures” as proxies for behaviours.\(^{44}\) Having said that, behaviour

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\(^{39}\) For examples and evaluations of three UK based programmes see: Daniel Wight (2011), The effectiveness of school-based sex education: What do rigorous evaluations in Britain tell us? Education and Health Vol.29 No. 4, 2011.


\(^{41}\) Ideas about the reasons why rape happens that often blame the behaviour of the victim http://www.rapecrisis.org.uk/commonmyths2.php.

\(^{42}\) Ricardo, Eads and Barker, (2011); Engaging Boys and Young Men in the Prevention of Sexual Violence, SVRI.

\(^{43}\) Davis and Liddell (2002); Fay and Medway (2006); Foubert and Marriott (1997); Hillenbrand-Gun (2010); Stephens and George (2009), cited in Ricardo, Eads and Barker.

\(^{44}\) Ricardo, Eads& Barker (2011).
change theories suggest a strong link between changes in attitude and subsequent changes in behaviour, but such assumptions do need to be tested, and/or the theory of change made more explicit in the development of interventions to allow the testing of such assumptions over time.

Two exceptions to this, both examples of programmes in South Africa, Stepping Stones and Sisters for Life, have been able to demonstrate sustained changes in attitudes and behaviour over time, and in the latter example, showed a considerable reduction in the use of violence towards a partner.

Sexual violence in “dating” relationships is a significant issue in many contexts. One of the few interventions with evidence that it reduces the incidence of violence in teenage dating relationships is the Safe Dates model. The interactive programme is aimed at helping young people, boys and girls, to recognize the difference between caring relationships and controlling and manipulative ones. This school based, multi–component, mixed sex intervention, is one of the very few studies which has clearly demonstrated sustained change in both attitudes and behaviour over time. Interestingly, while there was evidence of changes in attitude towards the use of violence in dating relationships, a year after the intervention, reduction in the incidence of violent behaviour was not evident until the four year follow up. It is suggested that the programme is successful as it is offered to young adolescents, those at the beginning of their dating “careers”, reinforcing the importance of starting prevention work early.

A version of this was implemented with Oak support in Switzerland through the Association Sortir Ensemble et Se Respecter.

Reducing risks by influencing bystander attitudes and behaviour

Work focusing on bystander attitudes and behaviour represent a growing body of work that recognizes the value of “working with men and boys as potential allies, and to cultivate their commitment to and capacity for preventing and intervening.”

A rigorously evaluated sexual violence prevention program aimed at increasing the role of the bystander, based on a community of responsibility model, demonstrated both attitudinal and behaviour change that were sustained over time. This programme, even when delivered in only one session, taught women and men, potential bystanders, how to intervene safely and effectively in

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45 See Stepping Stones Resources.
47 In a recent UK research into "teen partner violence" Barter et al. (2009) note that 88 per cent of young people in their study of 1,353 young people aged between 13 and 17 years old, reported some form of violence in their intimate relationships, particularly affecting girls.
49 Ricardo, Eads and Barker, (2011).
cases of sexual violence before, during, and after incidents with strangers, acquaintances, or friends. Ensuring that the intervention complies with the best available evidence about effectiveness, and the potential for targeting certain recipients, might both help to maximise impact, with even a very low level of “treatment”.

Work that aims to help people to better protect children in their families and communities, is premised on the belief that equipping these people with information helps them be more alert to the warning signs in the behaviour of a would-be abuser, themselves or others, and helps them take action to stop it. StopitNow have been implementing such programmes in the US since 1992, and the UK since 2002, and while it is always hard to generate reliable data about prevention efforts, data about the numbers of people accessing and using their information, making reports about concerns to their help lines, suggests that these services are reaching and informing potentially protective adults, men and women. Recognising the cultural dimensions and specificity around attitudes and language about sexual abuse and violence, StopItNow UK are working with different ethnic communities, to tailor the language and approach, to ensure that they are consistent with protecting children, but also reach and are relevant for these different communities.

Prevention cannot simply rely on increasing children’s capacity to avoid becoming a victim. A recent review suggests that while there is evidence of the positive impact of “school–based educational programs [that] teach children, [in terms of] ... how to identify dangerous situations, refuse an abuser’s approach, break off an interaction, and summon help ... promote disclosure, reduce self–blame, and mobilize bystanders” there is little evidence about “whether education programs reduce victimization.” There is some discussion in the literature that such work may in fact increase the level of violence associated with sexual abuse in some instances.

Reducing risks by reducing childhood exposure to violence in the family setting

There is a link between the experience of or witnessing violence in the family and later perpetration of sexual violence. Thus interventions aimed at reducing violence in the family, family support, strengthening parent–child attachment and promoting positive non–violent forms of discipline, are all strategies with the potential to reduce the perpetration of sexual violence, in the short, medium and longer term.

Evidence about effectiveness of such interventions comes predominantly from work in high income contexts, but a review of work in low and middle income countries suggests that parenting interventions in some of these countries has improved parent–child relationships and reduced

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52 David Finkelhor (2009).
53 David Finkelhor (2009).

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negative parenting practices, reduce the incidence of violence within families, and thus can contribute to reducing the likelihood of the later perpetration of violence by children from those families.

Two high quality studies offered models for intervention design in low–resource settings. They suggest that “it is feasible to: use non–professional local staff to deliver interventions to parents; deliver interventions through home visits; and, add interventions to routine health services for pregnant women and new mothers.”

Recognising the role of families in the inter–generational transmission of attitudes around gender, the reviews commissioned by the Sexual Violence Research Initiative through an Oak Foundation grant, looked for examples of how parenting interventions had explicitly and consciously sought to change or address negative stereotypes; in practice, they found no evidence of such work.

**Reducing risks through work with offenders and those with harmful sexual behaviour**

Much of the work that is labelled “prevention” of sexual violence against children focuses on work with those who have already been convicted. It certainly dominates the more accessible literature on the topic.

Oak Foundation is interested in supporting and understanding more about this work, though currently this is a relatively small proportion of the work included under the broad heading of “Working with Men and Boys.”

The assumptions underpinning this focus area are that:

- the majority of those engaged in harmful sexual behaviour with children are men and boys;
- most sex offenders start sexually abusive behaviour as children or young adults;
- early intervention is helpful in reducing the risks of perpetration; and
- many interventions have only been tried and tested in high–income, high–resource environments and we need to find new models of work that can be helpful in low–income contexts.

Much of the published literature focuses on tertiary prevention programmes, those that work with people who have been convicted of sexually abusing a child. While these have a clear role to play in building a comprehensive system of preventative work, Oak Foundation and many of our partners, are keen to expand the range of potential interventions. The hope is to support and expand work that is positioned further upstream, that reduce the risks of abuse happening in the first place, rather than having the majority of resources focused on interventions that are implemented after the event.

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55 Knerr et al. (2011).
Further exploration and encouragement of this “secondary” prevention work is needed. This needs to be aimed at understanding what and how certain approaches can be effective in changing the behaviour of those whose past patterns of behaviour have given cause for concern (without necessarily crossing the threshold of formally being seen as a sexual offender). This raises questions about the potential for inappropriately and inaccurately labelling some children as demonstrating problematic or risky in terms of it leading to sexual offending. There are though individuals about whom parents, others and the children themselves, have some concerns, and who may benefit from non–stigmatising, non–punitive support and information. In many cases, this on its own might be sufficient to dispel their concerns and confirm that the behaviour in question falls within the very broad range of normal development.

One promising area of work might simply be ensuring that this population has access to the information and reflection available through some of the best models of sexuality education, i.e. ensuring that mainstream primary prevention programmes really reach those about whom some concerns have been raised. At the opposite end of the spectrum, work that has been successfully developed with young sex offenders might be adapted and used with some of this population, those considered to be demonstrating some elements of very risky or worrying sexual behaviour.

Current practice and thinking about tertiary prevention – work with offenders
While the focus of the rest of this paper has been on preventing sexual violence in the first instance, there is interest in and support for work with those who are convicted of sexual offences against children as a means of reducing the risks of further offending. Much of the evaluated practice around prevention to date has focused on tertiary prevention, work with individuals post–offence. This focus is reflected in much of the published literature, current research and in many policy and practice debates.

Despite its prevalence in the literature and discussions, there are limitations:

- the vast majority of the work is taking place in the USA, Northern Europe and Australia. There are very few studies from low resource contexts;
- little or no data rigorously comparing outcomes of different tertiary prevention approaches; and
- almost no comparison of the costs and impact of primary or secondary prevention efforts.

In some parts of the literature, high resource, intensive interventions, that demonstrate some impact on recidivism rates, are presented as if they are they represent the “gold” standard. The dominance of this approach limits the development of alternatives. Certainly in many contexts, tertiary prevention work receives all, or a disproportionate share, of the available resources, which in turn curtails the development of or even thinking about other models.

The lack of development about alternative models limits options. It is clear that simply transferring any model of practice from one context to another is probably neither possible in terms of resources, nor effective in terms of outcomes.
It is not clear whether such interventions would be as effective if applied in other nations or regions, due to cultural, contextual and other differences. Whilst potentially tempting, the application of one nation’s “solution” in a different country – in the absence of an analysis of the utility of that “solution” to the different types and circumstances of abuse in that country – can lead to poor policy and practice that fails to tackle the problem of CSA [child sexual abuse]. Every nation needs the confidence and knowledge to develop and deploy a response suited to its own circumstances rather than to simply implement solutions created elsewhere.57

Tertiary prevention work has demonstrated some positive outcomes. With dedicated resources and the political and public support to develop intense therapeutic models of work for convicted child sex offenders, there are indications of reductions in rates of recidivism. Recent overviews of tertiary prevention programmes suggest modest but reliable reductions in recidivism on the back of such therapeutic interventions with offenders.

However, opinion remains divided. Research also suggests that good assessments, that identify good candidates for therapeutic programmes, are critically important; i.e. tertiary prevention programmes are not universally effective. There are chronic offenders, who have offended over most of their lives, show little motivation to change, and offend against large numbers of children, who are very difficult to deter. For them, alternative approaches may be necessary, involving other ways of controlling or containing their behaviour; e.g. long term imprisonment and other ways of reducing opportunities to offend. This group may be only 10% of the group of convicted of sexual offences against children.58 This suggests that risk prediction and good assessment are key elements in selecting the right candidates for therapeutic programmes. However, Smallbone suggests that many of the available tools, though widely used, are of limited value (though clearly this is not a universally held view).

Smallbone also suggests that community–based programmes are generally more effective than prison based programmes, but that the majority of investment goes to prison based work. This may be the result of high rates of public concern and political pressure to be seen to be punishing, controlling and containing such offenders.

Approaches that take place outside of correctional institutions are being implemented and evaluated. One model of working in communities with professional supervision and management, through systems of community support, oversight and accountability, is the Circles of Support and Accountability (COSA) programme. This uses groups of volunteers with professional supervision to support sex offenders as they reintegrate into society after their release from prison. Evaluations of COSA indicate that participation in a COSA can result in statistically significant reductions in repeat

57 Lucy Faithfull Foundation (2013), Eradicating Child Sexual Abuse project flyer.
sexual offences in 70% of cases, relative to that predicted by risk assessment or matched comparison subjects. While such results are extremely encouraging, more work and longer term evaluation is needed to strengthen the evidence for such work, and to determine if and how such a model might be adapted to different contexts.

While tertiary interventions are being widely implemented in northern and western societies, their sustainability even in these contexts is not assured; many programmes are currently being cut in the face of economic constraints. Many of the tertiary prevention approaches are probably not transferable, (the COSA model may be the exception to this) and in practice have not been replicated in low or middle income countries where the financial (and human) resources for these very specialised interventions are not readily available.

Currently, there is little or no exchange and reflection that crosses the very established silos that separate tertiary prevention interventions from efforts that might be labelled as primary or secondary prevention efforts. In the absence of a common language, shared indicators, and different ways of reporting success, this segregation or separation is perpetuated. This means that opportunities for learning, sharing results, and adaptation is extremely limited. A project being coordinated by the Lucy Faithfull Foundation project, Eradicating Child Sexual Abuse or ECSA aims to find out more about effective and promising responses to child sexual abuse from around the world. This recognises that such abuse encompasses a range of behaviours and motivations, and that responses need to reflect this diversity. Drawing on the expertise of practitioners, researchers and academics, the project will develop a flexible and adaptable toolkit that will help in the identification of effective and locally appropriate strategies for preventing and responding to child sexual abuse. At the heart of the work is support for “out of the silo” thinking and debate, creatively connecting people employing diverse strategies, and expanding the focus on and thinking about outcomes and effectiveness of work aimed at reducing risks of offending or re–offending. By sharing and supporting reflection and discussion on the best available evidence from primary, secondary and tertiary prevention work, the project hopes to support the development of responses and prevention efforts that are realistic, sustainable and effective.


May 2014
Work with adolescents with harmful sexual behaviours

Given estimates that a very significant percentage of those sexually abusing children are themselves under the age of 18, it is important to explore what we know about reducing the risks of reoffending by adolescents.

Young people who sexually offend are a diverse group, with different backgrounds, offence and risk profiles and treatment needs. There is no single agreed cause and effect theory regarding adolescent sexual offending and there is currently a variety of treatment approaches for this population. Smallbone suggests that this is because the majority of treatment programs do not publish good quality treatment outcome studies that makes comparison about which are most effective difficult. This is in part because of the methodological challenges involved, but also because relatively few programs are funded to explicitly undertake evaluation and research alongside treatment. This suggests that there is a poor recognition in the ongoing gaps in the knowledge base, even around long established tertiary prevention programmes.

Hackett’s research offers some optimism about the potential for reducing the risks of sexual offending by young people. He stresses the importance of not viewing adolescents just as “small adults”; work with young people needs to take full account of the specific developmental stage and needs of this population. He suggests that interventions should be holistic, looking both at the specific abusive behaviour, but also wider aspects of the young person’s functioning, citing the positive results generated by developmentally specific cognitive behavioural work. There is evidence that such approaches have supported young people to move away from spiralling patterns of sexual abuse into appropriate and healthy forms of sexual expression.

Work that is explicitly resilience based is interesting and promising. It takes account of the fact that not all children exposed to the same risks or adversities, will respond in the same way. Many young people with harmful sexual behaviours have low self esteem, have limited life opportunities and chance to set their own goals, and determine their own futures (at times as a result of the management systems imposed as a result of their offending), all factors that are suggestive of low levels of resilience. Work aimed at strengthening resilience, enhancing self esteem and social competence, may be critical in helping them change, something that can be lost in the interventions that focus only on the deficits or problematic behaviours…. “It is important not to be distracted or seduced only by the big questions … professionals may have lost sight of crucial details of what can sustain the positive development of this child today.”

Nesbit et al., suggest that “Programs that appear most likely to demonstrate treatment effects are those that address functioning in a broad range of areas, including the individual, family, school and community systems … a reliance on individual–level interventions by themselves appears unlikely to

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61 Hackett suggests that evidence from the UK shows that a third of all incidents of sexual abuse of children are perpetrated by children. Jewkes R, Sikweyiya Y et al. (2011), suggests that most men who will ever perpetrate a rape will do so for the first time as adolescents.

lead to the reductions in recidivism associated with the more holistic treatment approaches. It also appears that involvement of families is an adjunct to successful treatment.63

While many programmes do not measure outcomes, there is substantial empirical support for the use of “multisystemic therapy”, an intensive, family–focused and community–based treatment program for youth with chronic problematic behaviour. This aims at helping caregivers manage and nurture their challenging adolescents more effectively. It has a focus on strengths as levers for change, and works at individual, home and community levels. A 10 year follow up study supports the effectiveness of this approach with sexually abusive youth.64

Community based interventions can be delivered at significantly lower cost than those relying on residential provision. There is no evidence to suggest that residential treatment programs are superior to community–based treatment programs for this population, and in fact there are indications that removing a young person from their normal social environment may make it harder for them to generalise or retain any treatment gains.

Optimism about the future for young people with sexually harmful behaviour is also based on an understanding that a substantial majority of adolescent sex offenders do not proceed to commit further sexual offences. Rates of transition from adolescent to adult sex offender are now thought to be much lower than previously assumed. The challenge for programmes for adolescents who sexually offend is therefore “to provide high quality assessment and appropriate intensity of intervention for higher–risk youth, while ensuring that valuable treatment resources are not wasted and that lower–risk youth and their families are not drawn into intensive, protracted, and often highly intrusive interventions.”65

This review of the literature, including some Oak Foundation grantees suggests an evolving consensus about the elements of successful programmes for adolescents, but recognises substantial ongoing gaps in evidence. Good quality research and reflection continue to be needed to determine what works.66

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64 Borduin et al., cited in Hackett (2004).
65 Ian Nisbet et al. (2005).
66 Ian Nisbet et al. (2005).