

Press Kit digitale per l'incontro sulla protezione dei minori

A look at child abuse on the global level

Useful links:

- [*Towards a Global Indicator: on Unidentified Victims in Child Sexual Exploitation Material, Summary Report*](#), ECPAT, INTERPOL, 2018.
- [*A Familiar Face: Violence in the lives of children and adolescents*](#), United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), 2017.
- [*Toward a world free from Violence: Global survey on violence against children*](#), Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary General on Violence Against Children, 2015.
- [*Studio multi-paese sui drivers della violenza all'infanzia*](#), Istituto degli Innocenti, Firenze, 2016.
- [*Inspire: Seven Strategies for Ending Violence Against Children*](#), World Health Organization, 2016.

Premise: The true gravity of the phenomenon is unknown

Sexual abuse of minors, an historical phenomenon which can be found in every culture and in every society, has relatively recently become the object of systematic study. This is due to the changed sensibility of public opinion on a topic that in the past was considered a taboo. Even today, however, the available statistics gathered by various national and international organizations (WHO, UNICEF, INTERPOL, EUROPOL, etc.) do not represent the true extent of the phenomenon which is often underestimated, primarily because many cases of sexual abuse of minors are not reported. In fact, **1 out of 3 tell no one** (THORN, 2017). Research conducted by UNICEF in 30 countries confirms this fact. A small percentage of victims said that they asked for help. Behind this reluctance could be the fear of vendetta, feelings of guilt, shame, confusion, distrust in institutions, cultural and social conditioning, but also misinformation regarding the services and structures that can help. The one thing that is certain is that millions of children in the world are victims of exploitation and sexual abuse.

General Data¹

The Victims

► **Global level:** In 2017, the WHO estimated that up to **1 billion minors between the ages of 2 and 17 years of age have endured violence** either physical, emotional, or sexual. Sexual abuse (from groping to rape), according to some UNICEF estimates from 2014, affected over **120 million children**, representing the highest number of victims. In 2017, the same UN organization reported that in 38 low and middle income countries, almost 17 million adult women admitted having a forced sexual relationship during their childhood.

¹ The data reported here refers to a sampling of countries chosen on the basis of the availability of reliable data.

► **Europe:** In 2013, the WHO estimated that **almost 18 million babies** had been victims of sexual abuse. Of these, 13.4% were girls and 5.7%, boys. According to UNICEF, in 28 European countries, about 2.5 million young women have reported sexual abuse, with or without physical contact, before the age of 15 years (data published in 2017). In addition, 44 million (about 22.9%) have been victims of physical violence, while 55 million (29.6%) have been victims of psychological violence. And this is not all: in 2017, an INTERPOL report on the sexual exploitation of minors led to the identification of 14,289 victims in 54 European countries.

► **Asia:** In India, between 2001 and 2011, the "**Asian Center for Human Rights**" reported a total of **48.338 cases of the rape of minors**, with an increase of 336%: from 2,113 cases in 2001, to 7,112 cases in 2011.

► **North America:** In the United States, official government data reports that over **700 million children** are victims of violence and abuse every year. According to the International Center for Missing and Exploited Children (ICMEC), one out of 10 children experiences sexual abuse.

► **Oceania:** In Australia, according to data published by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) in February 2018, covering the years 2015-2017, 1 out of 6 women (16%, or 1.5 million) reported that they were abused physically or sexually before the age of 15, and 1 out of 9 men (11%, or 9.92 thousand) reported that they were abused when they were boys. Between 2015-2016, about 450 million children were under child protection measures and 55,600 minors had been removed from their homes to treat the abuse suffered and prevent further abuse. The risks that the native populations experience should not be forgotten: according to AIHW, between 2015-2016, indigenous children were 7 times more likely to suffer abuse or abandonment in respect to their non-indigenous peers.

► **Africa** In South Africa the results of research conducted by the Center for Justice and Crime Prevention revealed that in 2016, 1 out of 3 South Africans, male or female, was at risk of sexual abuse before reaching the age of 17. According to that study, the first of its kind on the national scale in South Africa, **784.967** teenagers between the ages of 15 and 17 had already experienced sexual abuse. The victims in this case are prevalently boys. Not even 1/3 had reported the violence to the police.

In other African countries, the sexual abuse of minors is part of the wider context of violence linked to conflict which plagues the continent and makes it difficult to quantify. The phenomenon is also closely connected with the practice of **early marriage** which is widespread in various African nations.

Who commits the abuse?

► On the **global level**, it has emerged that such violence (whether physical, sexual or emotional) is committed mostly by **parents, relatives, spouses of child brides, or teachers**. In addition, according to UNICEF data from 2017 regarding 28 countries, out of 10 adolescents who have reported forced sexual relations, 9 revealed that they were victims of a person they know or was close to the family.

► The home is not the only theater of violence. Others, such as **schools and the world of sports** are also environments in which episodes of sexual abuse can occur. Research done by the UK's National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children in 2011 reported that 29% of the children interviewed reported that they had experienced sexual harassment (physical and verbal) in the sporting centers they frequented.

Online

► With the develop of the internet, cases of abuse and violence perpetrated online is clearly growing. According to data from 2017 from the Internet Watch Foundation (IWF), **a web page displays images of children being sexually abused every 7 minutes**. In 2017, 78,589 URLs were identified that contained images of sexual abuse, concentrated particularly in the Netherlands, followed by the United States, Canada, France and Russia. 55% of the victims are less than 10 years old. 86% contained images of girls, 7% of boys, and 5% contained images of both boys and girls.

Sex tourism

► According to data from 2017, the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), each year **3 million** persons take a trip in order to have sexual relations with minors. The most popular destinations are **Brazil, Dominican Republic, Colombia, Thailand and Cambodia**, and more recently, some African and Eastern European countries.

► The first six countries of origin of those who perpetrate the abuse are: France, Germany, the United Kingdom, China, Japan and Italy. Not to be overlooked is the growing number of women traveling to developing countries seeking paid sex with minors. In total, they represent about 10% of the world's sex tourists.

► In addition, according to a study conducted by ECPAT International (End Child Prostitution in Asian Tourism) between 2015 and 2016, 35% of these sex tourists are regular customers, while 65% are occasional customers. It is a significant fact that the perpetrators of such crimes, in most cases, are oblivious of the fact that they are committing a crime.

“Best Practices”

Under the leadership of the WHO, a group of 10 international agencies² developed an approved a series of strategies called **INSPIRE**, in total **7 strategies to put an end to violence against children**. Each letter of the word INSPIRE represents one of the strategies, most of which have proven to be effective in preventing various types of violence, as well as being beneficial in such sectors as mental health, education, and crime reduction.

The seven strategies are:

- **Implementation and enforcement of laws:** e.g. prohibiting violent discipline and limiting access to alcohol and firearms.
- **Norms and values:** e.g. modifying the cultural norms that permit the sexual abuse of girls or aggressive behavior between boys.
- **Safe environments:** i.e. identifying the “hot spots” for violence in the neighborhood and then addressing local causes through policies aimed at resolving the problems and providing other types of intervention.
- **Parent and caregiver support:** e.g. providing formation for parents of young people, and first-time parents.
- **Income and economic strengthening:** such as microfinance fostering economic equality between men and women;
- **Response and support services:** e.g. guaranteeing children who have been exposed to violence adequate access to emergency care and to psychiatric and social services.
- **Education and life skills:** such as ensuring that children attend school and providing life training and other social skills.

² CDC: United States Centers for Disease Control and Prevention; CRC: Convention on the Rights of the Child; End Violence Against Children: The Global Partnership; PAHO: Pan American Health Organization; PEPFAR: President’s Emergency Program for AIDS Relief; TfG: Together for Girls; UNICEF: United Nations Children’s Fund; UNODC: United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime; USAID: United States Agency for International Development; WHO: World Health Organization