DEVELOPING A COMPREHENSIVE PREVENTIVE STRATEGY TO ELIMINATE THE DEMAND FOR THE SEXUAL EXPLOITATION OF CHILDREN

Primary Prevention, Secondary Prevention and Tertiary Prevention

The broad objective of eliminating the multi-level demand for the sexual exploitation of children (SEC) requires that efforts be made to conceive a comprehensive framework spanning from recovery to preventive approaches. A public health model may be adapted as a way to promote a "protection for all" initiative in recognition of the documented progress that the primary health care methodology has achieved in promoting the "Health for All" movement over the past four decades.[1] Adopting a public health approach, a primary protection model can distinguish between three levels of intervention, while in practice tackling demand for SEC may require combining action at more than one level.[2]

1. *Primary Prevention:* This level is aimed at preventing SEC before it occurs;

2. *Secondary Prevention:* This level is aimed at preventing SEC in high-risk groups; and

3. *Tertiary Prevention:* This level is aimed at preventing further SEC offences through interventions that specifically target child victims and offenders. This level will effectively relate to the rehabilitative measures prevailing at present.

Primary Prevention for All

Primary preventive interventions include cost-effective measures addressing the general population, aimed at creating conditions for children to be protected from all forms of sexual exploitation. To this end, safety nets must be built in families, schools and communities to make safe environments through designing mechanisms that protect all children. Resilience of young people, parents, caregivers, educators, service providers, local government institutions and entire communities must be strengthened

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1   Sallie Yea, "Towards a Prevention Framework for Child Sexual Exploitation," 2015, unpublished paper.
2   *Ibid.*

in a way to withstand attacks by sexual offenders. Children, in particular, should be empowered to protect themselves from sexual abuse and exploitation by recognising the risks. The general public should be informed and sensitised to the grave consequences of sexual exploitation on children's health and development, and the provision of the law with regard to sexual offending.

In the context of information communication technologies (ICTs), a broad response will necessitate working directly with young people to build their knowledge about risks and how to avoid them. This is increasingly important as Internet usage becomes more private - taking place in children's private spaces, such as bedrooms - and is availed through personal mobile devices.

It is also important that primary prevention include initiative involving men and boys. For example, the International Society for the Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect organised the Denver Thinking Space 2013[3], recognising that, while men and adolescent boys are responsible for the majority of sexual abuse, they should be seen not just as a problem, but as a part of the solution.[4]

Providing relevant and timely information to children "enables them to make informed choices, avoid risks, and find and offer help when needed."[5] Targeted information should be tailor made to cater not only to the needs of potential victims, but also of potential offenders. In 2009, SaferNet Brasil, for example, created an educational kit on Internet safety for educators with the aim of improving students' online safety.[6]

Secondary Prevention for At-Risk Groups

Secondary preventive interventions aim at creating targeted, cost-intensive safety shields to keep vulnerable children away from situations that are potentially abusive. To this end, specific interventions must be designed to extend special protection to children living on the streets and in red-light areas; children engaged in labour; runaways, in transit or migrating children; child brides; children belonging to minority communities or otherwise discriminated; homosexual, bisexual and transgender children and other such at-risk groups.

At the secondary prevention level, situation and vulnerability-specific interventions and specialised methodologies should be designed to cater to the special needs and rights of children prone to sexual exploitation. In parallel, responses must be devised to disable potential offenders with targeted information about the consequences of sexual abuse acts, potential legal repercussions, more stringent Internet control mechanisms, social pressure and shaming, and diversion and education programmes aimed at re-directing likely abusive behaviour. For instance, the Institute of Sexology and Sexual Medicine in Berlin developed a prevention approach called the Prevention Project Dunkelfeld, or the "Don't Offend" campaign, which encourages self-identified but not officially registered paedophiles and hebephiles to seek professional help to prevent offending.[7] Another example of an initiative geared at reaching out to potential offenders before they act include the "Stop It Now" campaign, which involves providing a confidential helpline and online resources for advice, support and information.[8]

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3   Hendry, Enid (2013), "Working with Men and Boys - A Child Protection Strategy: Report of the ISPCAN Denver Thinking Space 2013", accessed 2 August 2016, https://c.ymcdn.com/sites/www.ispcan.org/resource/resmgr/DTS13/ISPCAN_2013_Denver_Thinking_.pdf.
4   *Ibid.*
5   UNICEF (2011), "Child Safety Online, Global Changes and Strategies", December 2011, 15.
6   SaferNet Brasil (2010), "Nética: Ethics and education for developing cyber-citizenship in Brazil", accessed 5 September 2016, http:// files.eun.org/insafe/blog/Netica.doc, accessed 31 August 2011.
7   Don't Offend (n.d.), "Do you like children in ways you shouldn't?" Don't offend website, accessed 2 August 2016, https://www.dont-offend.org/.
8   Stop It Now (n.d.), "Concerned about your behaviour?" accessed 2 August 2016, http://www.stopitnow.org.uk/concerned_about_your_behaviour.htm.

While certain groups are more at risk of SEC because of social and economic factors affecting them, the vast majority of young people who are fast gaining access to online environments can now be regarded as being broadly vulnerable in so far as they are exposed to risks that were virtually unknown to previous generations.

Tertiary Prevention for Victims

Tertiary preventive interventions focus on children who have been already sexually violated to avert further abuse. This should be done by implementing interventions specifically oriented to child victims and offenders. Highly specialised, and potentially more costly, child protection recovery programmes should aim at achieving psychosocial restoration and reintegration in the family and the community. Likewise, perpetrators should undergo prosecution and rehabilitation programmes to prevent them from re-offending on the basis of stringent legal frameworks aimed to punish offenders and protect children.

It must be recognised that tertiary prevention dealing with reactive interventions, while necessary, in fact marks the failure of the primary and secondary preventive measures taken, or lack thereof as it may be the case. Efforts need to be made to strengthen primary and secondary prevention to protect all children from harm before exploitation and abuse occur.

Pre-Primary Prevention

In addition to the primary, secondary and tertiary prevention, a pre-primary level may be considered relating to the situations and conditions that make the sexual exploitation of children possible. Measures aimed at addressing abusive gender norms, poverty, marginalisation and other underlying causes of SEC – even before intervening at the primary prevention level – would help to ensure that preventive action starts from transforming the very environment where exploitation might take place. An evidence-based programming approach would assess the extent to which prevention strategies aiming to curb SEC may also impact on preventing child sexual abuse, and vice versa.

Developing Comprehensive Preventive Action

A multitier framework as described would favour a shift towards more integrated interventions. Presently, SEC-oriented responses tend to be organised by basic interventions, such as discrete activities aimed at solving specific issues in the short term, like providing legal aid to an abused child, or just focusing on child online protection, dismissing the children who are not connected online but still face similar risks. A comprehensive prevention framework would instead support integrated interventions that, working at different levels, have the ability to tackle the causal chain of sexual violence in the medium and long term. While simple actions normally target single children or small groups, holistic interventions have the capacity of comprehensively addressing larger groups, entire communities and even systems.

A preventive strategy to tackle demand for SEC requires that specific measures, which may already exist, be reviewed and further strengthened to support a larger paradigm shift in policy and programme development.

A common tool that has been used to address the private sector's role in the demand for sexual exploitation rests with corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives. "International child law has tried to involve the private sector in a variety of mechanisms including norms, codes, compacts and principles.[...]At the present time no international standard – be it treaty, convention, protocol or declaration – exists that specifically addresses CSR and child protection."[9]

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9   Hecht, Mark E. (2016), "A fourth optional protocol to the convention on the right of the child: establishing a new standard for corporate violations of international child law", Expert paper for the Global Study on the Sexual Exploitation of Children in Travel and Tourism, 17, accessed 6 September 2016, http://globalstudysectt.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/Expert-Paper-Hecht-Mark-Erik.pdf.

Current inadequacies of CSR can be grouped into two areas. "First, CSR mechanisms are products of particular social environments and are often framed by what businesses themselves want instead of what children's law requires. [...] Adhering businesses are largely in developed countries that already have domestic laws in place to govern children's rights. Current CSR mechanisms are also less likely to be followed by the companies that most need to address how their actions affect children,"[10] as they are the offspring of corporate discretion. Further, responsibility for who is in charge of international children's law is often unclear. Gaps persist between international and national legal systems as well as between the private and public sectors.[11]

Although only a small proportion of those who commit sexual crimes against children have a prior sex offence record, developing offender management initiatives to stop situational and preferential abusers from re-offending must be part of the comprehensive framework to tackle the demand. Legal mechanisms and programmes for reducing recidivism are typically considered tertiary strategies, applied only after the harm has already occurred. Nevertheless, according to practitioners supporting their development and implementation, they may have primary prevention effects as well because (in theory) the fear of punishment contributes to dissuading potential perpetrators from committing child sex crimes.[12]

Considering that sex offenders' management initiatives are generally expensive, it is essential that resources be more intensively concentrated on those perpetrators that are at high-risk to reoffend. In this connection, the use of risk assessment tools remains crucial not only to identify higher-risk offenders but also to detect changes in risk.[13] It is vital that multi-disciplinary collaboration schemes be developed involving all relevant actors and services (i.e., prison, probation and police services, local government, health professionals, housing services) and specialised training be delivered to them.[14]

Available literature suggests that management of child sex offenders is more effective when combined with programmes aimed at their rehabilitation and reintegration. Whilst working with offenders may be controversial and challenging,[15] rehabilitation is particularly important as a means to prevent reoffending.

Finally, the cornerstone of any prevention strategy is adequate information, communication and education of the involved stakeholders. Significant experiences have been documented of child protection efforts aimed at educating the public, including potential offenders and victims, and thereby possibly preventing demand. These include:

- "Involving children as campaigners and advocates, and utilising their unique insights and experiences to inform the development of more effective protection."[16] In Benin, the Gambia, Kenya, Mozambique, Nigeria, South Africa and Togo, ECPAT International supported young people in raising public awareness by campaigning on online risks and the responsibilities of governments and ICT providers to protect children in the online environment.[17]

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10 *Ibid*., 19.
11 *Ibid*.
12 Finkelhor, Donald (2009), "The Prevention of Childhood Sexual Abuse", Future Child, vol. 19(2), (2009), 171, accessed 2 August 2016, http://futureofchildren.org/futureofchildren/publications/docs/19_02_08.pdf.\
13 *Ibid*., 179.
14 Lobanov-Rostovsky, Christopher (n.d.), "Chapter 8: Sex Offender Management Strategies", accessed 6 September 2016, http://www.smart.gov/SOMAPI/sec1/ch8_strategies.html.
15 For example, the Lucy Faithful Foundation in the UK was forced to discontinue their offender treatment programme not only for lack of adequate funding, but also because the local community objected to have the rehabilitation centre nearby.
16 UNICEF, Child safety online. Global challenges and strategies, UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre, 2011, 16.
17 *Ibid.*

- "Building capacity among professionals who work with children to alert them to the risks children face, and teach them how to recognise warning signs and symptoms. In Thailand, for example, a digital literacy initiative on safe Internet resulted in a training module which has been used to train some 300 teachers. Those teachers subsequently delivered safety messages to more than 70,000 children."[18]

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18 *Ibid*.citing Odhiambo, Victoria, 'Youth Mobilization to Promote Codes of Conduct in Internet Cafes in Africa', Presentation for Corporate Engagement in IT Companies Seminar, ECPAT World Congress III, Rio de Janeiro, 27 November 2008; available at: www.ecpat.net/ WorldCongressIII/PDF/ Publications/T4_WS3c.pdf, accessed 31 August 2011.

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