

**CASE
STUDY**

TACTEEN NAEIL IN SOUTH KOREA

How to quickly adapt services and develop experience in providing counselling services to boy survivors of sexual abuse and exploitation.



**SEXUAL
EXPLOITATION OF
BOYS**



ECPAT KOREA

TACTEEN



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TABLE OF CONTENTS

CONTEXT OF DOCUMENTATION	2
INTRODUCTION	3
METHODOLOGY FOR THE DOCUMENTATION OF PRACTICE	4
BEGINNING TO WORK WITH BOY SURVIVORS: KEY OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES	5
THE ADJUSTMENTS MADE TO INCREASE ACCEPTANCE AMONGST BOY SURVIVORS	7
EXAMPLES OF SPECIFIC ACTIVITIES CONDUCTED WITH BOYS	11
COUNSELLING WITH PARENTS AND FAMILIES	13
THE HUMAN AND TECHNICAL RESOURCES NEEDED FOR IMPLEMENTATION	15
CONCLUSION AND POSSIBILITIES FOR EXPANSION OF WORK	17

CONTEXT OF DOCUMENTATION

Given that programmatic responses to identify and meet the particular needs of boys are scarce, ECPAT International launched the [Global Boys Initiative \(GBI\)](#) to explore the sexual exploitation of boys and the services available for their protection. The Global Boys Initiative embarked on a series of research projects in countries around the world to shed light on understanding the scale of sexual exploitation taking place with children, vulnerability and risk factors, barriers to disclosure and access to services, and what we need to improve prevention and response strategies. With the completion of the Initiative's first phase of research, we can now speak with confidence on a number of pressing issues related to the sexual exploitation of boys, successfully consolidating what we know to influence and frame the agenda for programming, advocacy and new research. We know that the sexual exploitation of boys is a global problem and have gathered information on key drivers, risk situations, gender norms, barriers to access, among other things. We are now focusing on how to address these challenges and how to support boys and service providers in the fight against sexual exploitation.

In November 2021, ECPAT International and Tacteen Naeil (ECPAT South Korea) published a report on the [Sexual Exploitation of Boys in South Korea](#). In partnership with the ECPAT International secretariat, the study was based on primary field research (with boy survivors and with frontline social workers supporting sexually exploited boys in the country) and on secondary data (a desk review of the national legal framework on child protection against sexual exploitation and a literature review with a focus on boys). By identifying the most salient issues, the study results aim to improve the services and ensure that these are gender-sensitive and accessible for all children regardless of their gender.

In July 2022, we began a process of mobilising ECPAT members, partners and practitioners working with boys in different regions of the world to inform them about the GBI, explore possibilities for implementing the Initiative at country and regional levels, and capitalise on members and partners' experiences in working with boys.

In discussions with our member Tacteen Naeil in South Korea, several points of learning were identified as relevant to the success of the GBI nationally and globally. These included the documentation of their work with boy survivors of sexual abuse and exploitation.

To this end, the aim was to document the working practices of direct assistance to boy survivors of sexual abuse and exploitation in South Korea in order to capitalise on these experiences, to encourage learning from other organisations in other countries around the world, and to feed into GBI's practical knowledge – thus contributing to answering the global question: *“how can we work boys at risk, or survivors, of sexual exploitation and abuse in a gender-sensitive approach?”*

INTRODUCTION

Tacteen Naeil (ECPAT South Korea) is the member of ECPAT International in South Korea. Tacteen Naeil is an organisation founded in Seoul in 1995 that conducts national support, prevention and advocacy activities for child protection and children's rights in the country. The purpose of Tacteen Naeil is to create a society that fully protects the rights of children and adolescents, to foster an environment where children and adolescents could lead an autonomous life, and to help children and adolescents grow up to become global citizens who put universal human values into practice. The vision of the organisation is to help children and adolescents think critically, act, and grow up to become global citizens.

Tacteen Naeil and ECPAT International collaborated for a ground-breaking research project on the sexual exploitation of boys in South Korea during 2020-21. In South Korea, research showed when sexual exploitation of boys happens, the experience for boys contradicts common norms they may have internalised that are related to their gender. This type of experience is known to lead to boys blaming themselves for not living up to the expectations, or even lead to victim-blaming from others, and a culture of ignoring sexual violence towards boys. Additionally, the perception within South Korean culture that males overall hold more social resources and power and are thus more likely to be offenders of sexual violence (against women and girls) rather than victims, is also believed to contribute to the reluctance to acknowledge male victims of sexual violence.¹

1 Pages 4-5, https://ecpat.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/Global-Boys-Initiative-South-Korea-National-Report_English.pdf

METHODOLOGY FOR THE DOCUMENTATION OF PRACTICE

This case study was produced with the use of an assessment and learning tool developed by ECPAT International's Research and GBI's teams. The assessment and learning questionnaire guided the interview with the coordination and the case management team. The questions included in the questionnaire aimed at collecting information on what practices seem effective according to the organisation in providing case management assistance to boy survivors of sexual abuse and exploitation and what key elements need to be considered in addressing the complex and unique challenges that boys face in accessing support. The methodology was applied during a visit to the office of the organisation and its services, in which direct observations could be conducted on the physical space and resources.

The research conducted in the framework of the GBI tells us that boys who are involved in situations of sexual exploitation face a series of very complex challenges and issues. In addition, findings of the research confirm that perceptions of male invulnerability and gender biases are spread amongst boys, their families and service providers, affecting negatively the cycle of help seeking and provision of support to boy survivors. The experience gathered by the teams of Tacteen Naeil offer important learnings on **how to overcome gender biases and quickly adjust services to provide support to boy survivors of sexual exploitation and abuse**. This case study focuses therefore on how to challenge gender norms and biases within support team, boys and their families, and how to use research and evidence to adjust the functioning of child protection services as to be gender-sensitive.

Beginning to work with boy survivors: key opportunities and challenges

From the foundation of Tacteen Naeil, the organisation aimed at providing assistance and support to all children, with no distinction in the provision of services to girls and boys. However, in the past, the organisation did not receive reports of sexual abuse and exploitation of boys, as society's perception on male invulnerability on these issues made boys go undetected. The organisation employs a team of trained and certified counsellors who provide case management and psychosocial support services to children and their families.

More recently, the attention of the media on notorious cases, such as the *Nth Room case*² and *Another Nth Room case*³, as well as changes in national legislation, slowly started to change the perception of boys' invulnerability when it comes to issues of sexual abuse and exploitation. The national law regulating sexual violence in South Korea was amended in 2013 to include all human beings, and no longer only women and girls. This change triggered some evolution in the level of social awareness on the issue and allowed Tacteen Naeil to start receiving some initial reports on cases of boy survivors.

Tacteen Naeil organised a press conference in front of the city hall and launched an online campaign to have the Nth Room taken down from social media and to raise awareness about the risks related to child safety in online interactions. Tacteen Naeil also became one of the first organisations providing support services to boys in this framework. Talking openly and publicly about how both boys and girls were affected by the abuse, allowed boys and families to start reaching out and seeking out help and support. Initially, boys accessing the organisation's services were mostly concerned with the removal of self-generated material. The provision of services to boy survivors required the staff of Tacteen Naeil to adjust their attitudes and communications techniques. In this respect, the research conducted by Tacteen Naeil with ECPAT International in 2021 on the [sexual exploitation of boys in South Korea](#) was very timely.

“The timing of the research was perfect. We thought we had a very good system of support, but we had biases and lacked confidence in working with boys”.

2 The “Nth Room” case is a criminal case involving blackmail, cybersex trafficking, and the spread of sexually exploitative videos via the Telegram app between 2018 and 2020 in South Korea. The number of confirmed victims is at least 103, including 26 children.

3 The “Another Nth Room” case is a similar criminal case to the “Nth Room” and involved the sexual exploitation and abuse of 70 boys: <https://thediplomat.com/2022/01/south-koreas-constant-struggle-with-digital-sex-crimes/>

With the support of ECPAT International, Tacteen Naeil team of counsellors received a four-week training on gender norms and biases to strengthen their capacity in working with boys. The training was critical in ensuring that counsellors could challenge their gender biases and interiorised stereotypes about masculinity and perceptions on male invulnerability. The training included interactive learning exercises to challenge interiorised beliefs and attitudes, based on the counsellors' expressed needs. Some of the counsellors were initially concerned with the shift, as most of their experience was with girls and lacked confidence in dealing with boys' reactions and behaviours.

An additional challenge could be found in the boys' reluctance to meet and receive in person counselling on these issues. The boys' internalised assumption that they did not need to ask for help and that they could manage with the situation on their own therefore had an impact on the ability of Tacteen Naeil to provide consistent support. This challenge required counsellors to put extra efforts and adapt attitudes and techniques showing the benefits of support to boys in a way that could be understood and accepted.



The adjustments made to increase acceptance amongst boy survivors

Tacteen Naeil receives child protection cases directly through its helpline and referrals from government and other civil society agencies and organisations, as well as from education institutions. The first step is a phone consultation, that – according to client’s will – can be followed up by an in person consultation. If relevant and possible, Tacteen Naeil would provide case management services and referrals to specialised support services. The helpline number and services are made known to the public through awareness raising and information sharing activities that are done online, through media and in schools. The helpline operates from 9am to 6pm during the working week. This helpline operates in coordination with the national helpline (24/7 free toll number). Calls received by the national helpline in the evening and at night are referred to Tacteen Naeil for support to cases of child sexual abuse and exploitation.

THE FIRST PHONE INTERACTION

In South Korea, boys are expected to be tough and to not show emotions or help-seeking behaviours. Making the first call can therefore be a very difficult action for many boy survivors and some of the boys calling the organisation’s helpline do not come in for the first in person consultation. This is an ongoing challenge for the organisation, but its staff developed a few techniques to increase the chances that boys come in and seek support:

- Counsellors talk to boys carefully, taking into account how difficult that call is for them. This means that counsellors try to make the conversation friendlier and take away the authority perception. Using slang words and avoiding formal language has been noted to help massively in this regard;
- As it might take more courage for boys to call and ask for help, counsellors try to be more proactive and reassure the boys about confidentiality and share clear information about all the support they are entitled to receive;
- Counsellors suggest several options for dates and time during the working week to conduct the first in person meeting with the boys, and try to adjust to the extent possible to the suggestions made by boys so that they feel comfortable and ready to meet.

The personnel of Tacteen Naeil also observed that, when making the first call, boys might express feelings of guilt and shame. Boys might indeed ask questions such as *“did I do something wrong? Was this my fault?”*. In these situations, it is critical to avoid secondary stigmatization of the boys and reassure them by using kind affirmative words, for example: *“you did not do anything wrong, these situations happen to other boys as well”*. Sometimes boys might also refer to cases of friends as being survivors of sexual abuse or exploitation, and avoid talking about their individual case. In this case, it has been noted important to avoid questioning the boy and refer to the case in third person.

In general, as the levels of stigma and discrimination tend to be higher amongst boys, it has been noted essential to avoid making suggestions on reporting to the police during the first phone conversation. Counsellors transmit the message that they can do this when they are ready. The police report is a pre-condition to receive support from state services, but not to receive services directly from Tacteen Naeil. Some boys might also ask directly if they need to interact with the police during the first phone conversation, and some hang up the phone right after asking that question.

“If you encourage too strongly reporting to the police initially, this backfires”.

The phone conversation does not always result in getting the boy to come for the in person counselling sessions, but can still represent an important opportunity to share necessary information on rights and services.

In those cases where boys wish to have online abuse material to be removed, counsellors share information on the process and how that works. In South Korea, the request of removal cannot come from a third party but needs to be submitted by the boy himself. During phone conversations, counsellors explain this process to the boys and offer the possibility of doing it together at Tacteen Naeil's office: *“I will guide you through the process, I will not look at your phone or your screen (if you are afraid of me watching the video), but I will help you in the steps of the request to delete it”.*

THE IN-PERSON SESSIONS

Ensuring that a boy who called comes in for a first in person counselling session remains an important challenge for the organisation, which thus mostly meets with boys who are directly referred by other structures⁴. This challenge is related to the social perception that boys do not have to ask for help, and raises the need to conduct wider awareness raising campaigns on this at the national level.

In the first sessions, boys indeed show reluctance and fear. Fear of being punished for engaging in online or in person sexual activities was the number one concern in this respect. This required proactivity from counsellors to remove fear and shame away from the process and strengthen the perception of boys of being in a safe and friendly environment. Other challenges that are specific to boys are related to the their own ideas of masculinity.

“Boys try to act tough and manly. There is a perception that this is a place for women and girls only”.

To face these challenges, counsellors make sure that the initial and first session(s) remain more friendly and casual, and do not delve directly into the reasons why the boy is there. Counsellors might start by casual conversations asking about their friends, their possible partners, and things they like to do in their free time. Tacteen Naeil offers twelve 1-hour sessions during a period of approximately three months.

⁴ The organisation disposes of one counselling room in its main office in Seoul, South Korea.

There is a possibility to extend counselling sessions, but that depends on each individual boy and family case and situation. The frequency also depends on the individual situation of each boy. For most cases, sessions happen twice per week right after the report but then it will be adjusted moving forward. Sessions for and with parents are similarly adjusted, and will be explored later in **this document**.

Through the process of adaptation to work with boy survivors, Tacteen Naeil introduce several new elements that can be appreciated at the physical space and activity level:

- Considering the general perception that the organisation is a place that works with people with violence or mental health issues, the counselling rooms have been adapted with different kits that can be used to be make them more friendly and seem like playgrounds;
- Staff realised that boys generally feel uncomfortable when in a desk-counselling setting, so the organisation moved to an activity-based counselling, which is less formal and more friendly. Creative activities, online gaming and literacy activities, and games worked much better.

Adaptations also happened in the techniques and approaches that counsellors used in discussing with the boys and conducting activities with them during the counselling sessions. Counsellors try to act more as friends and take formality away from the sessions. Teenage boys, in particular, are significantly influenced by their peers, and are very used to vertical relationships and hierarchy with their parents and teachers. In this sense, counsellors show them a horizontal approach, showing that they are also part of their peer group. To do this, some counsellors use a mix of different techniques:

1. Learning to act like one of them. This means learning not to be intimidated when boys might adopt aggressive or 'tough' behaviours, but rather act calm and show control over the situation. Counsellors tend to be quick and firm in their communication in these scenarios, because the boy would notice if the counsellor is tense or nervous. For example, some boys might try to act tough by saying that they smoke or drink. A boy might say sentences as: "*I have just smoked outside*", as a way to show toughness and challenge authority. In these cases, the approach that seems to work for counsellors is to go in their direction, so if a boy just said that, a counsellor might say, "*It might feel great yes, but I am taking a break right now from it*". This way, counsellors can provide guidance to boys without showing punishment or disapproval. Acting like an adult who is not judging and acting formally seems to help as boys look up at adults as examples;
2. Preparing for the sessions by *studying* trends in social media platforms and learning slang words used by children and teenagers nowadays. The trends and terms created and used in social media platforms have an increasing role in the Korean society and are used daily by boys in their in person conversations as well. Showing boys that one is aware of trendy acronyms, jokes and trends helps in the construction of rapport and in being perceived as a friend and not an authority;
3. The language used is essential in creating a sense of respect with the boys. In South Korea, some words can be adapted according to the type of environment or conversation a person is in. Some words and terms are used to show formality and respect and, although counsellors want to have a friendly attitude towards boys, these terms can become helpful in some occasions. For example, some adolescent boys might live in contexts in which adults do not respect them, or took pride and respect away from them. Using these terms might make them feel respected and *valued*, and considered as someone that counsellors need to speak rightly to⁵;

5 This specific approach proved to be helpful for Tacteen Naeil in the specific context of South Korea and builds upon a recent youth movement asking adults to address to them in the formal respectful language. The formal style usually ends with *-da* and *-yo*, and contains more syllables.

4. Knowing what online games are popular amongst boys and learning how to play them, at least the basis. If one is able to show knowledge about characters, features and tips related to the games, this will make the conversation longer and create the ground to start discussing other topics as well;
5. Conducting informal activities outside of the counselling sessions – when appropriate, and in line with the organisation's Child Safeguarding policy – can also help the process of rapport building. In South Korea, Coin Karaoke is very popular amongst teenagers. Counsellors sometimes make appointments to go to Coin Karaoke together with boys to reinforce the relationship and reduce the impact of the process on the boys.

“It is important to show the boys that you are on equal terms, and that you are talking to each other as equal beings. We need to be able to speak their language. Being young does not mean that you are below”.

As some boys might be shyer, counsellors ensure to remember every piece of information shared by the boys during previous sessions and use those topics as a starter to initiate new sessions, showing the boys that they listened and that they care about what they have to say. The information collected is noted by counsellors after the sessions and transmitted to other counsellor colleagues, when the child protection case is transferred to another staff member.

Finally, it has been noted that boys – when compared to girls – struggle to disclose what really happened to them, even when trust and rapport with the counsellor is more solid. In many instances, boys might describe the issue as if it happened to someone else, some of their friends. In this case, it is important to listen to them and believe them. Counsellors might use sentences such as: *“what did your friend do when that happened to them? What did your friend feel or think?”*. This approach takes some of the pressure and the tension away, and allows the boys to navigate their feelings without the fear of stigmatization.

“Both the boy and I know that he is here for a reason. This strategy works, because there is always a moment where the third person story turns into a first person story”.

Whether boys share the experience in third or first person, they all appreciate and seem to be reassured by knowing that they are not alone and that this issue affected other boys as well. Counsellors share other stories – in a confidential way, or making up other cases – to make the boys feel more relieved about it and to give hope about their future.

“They tend to be comforted when they learn that similar things happened to other boys and that now they are doing better”.

Examples of specific activities conducted with boys

As seen, desk counselling seemed not to work with boys during counselling sessions, and the same is true for the direct conversations about the issue and their feelings. Tacteen Naeil deemed that conducting game, crafting and physical activities was more effective, and especially with adolescent boys. Most of the activities were designed and developed in the framework of the Global Boys Initiative research to conduct participatory consultations with boys. These activities were kept by the counselling team and adapted to be also used during the in person sessions. In general, it is important to be able to provide boys with several options and do not necessarily assume that boys might like one activity better than another one.

“We have examples where we realise we have biases ourselves. We thought some activities for crafting would only work with girls, but actually boys loved them”.

THE ESCAPE ROOM

One activity, developed during the research phase and adapted during for counselling, is an adaptation of the game 'escape room', which is very popular amongst teenagers in South Korea. The counselling room was set with screens on every wall with images projected upon them. The projected images have secret and hidden messages and are connected to Facebook and Instagram accounts. This activity, when used in ad hoc group counselling sessions, boys need to make sense of all the messages and build these account handles (or contacts). The value of this activity can be appreciated in motivating boys to build something together, to solve situations.

THE SALT BOTTLE

Using different colours and types of salt to fill empty glass bottles has proven to be particularly effective with boys. Boys are asked to put a message to their future selves in the bottle and then fill it with salt. When formulating the message, boys are asked to put a sentence to their future selves on what they would like to hear in a ten-year period or how they see themselves in the future. This helps the boys by showing them that this situation will pass and in restoring a sense of hope. It can help in starting the conversation about the future, their dreams and what kind of support they would like to have to achieve them.

THE LIFE GRAPH

Drawing a life graph means that boys are presented with a graph representation to discuss and point out situations and feelings that they might have encountered in their lives. A graph is drawn with high and low points where boys could indicate where they felt happy or sad. Counsellors start by giving examples of their lives and how their graphs would look like in order to encourage boys to start, and to show to the boys that everyone goes through challenging situations in life. This activity can be complemented by the construction of a 'gender tree' in which a picture of the tree is placed on the wall and used for boys to indicate – at each branch – what kind of support they would have liked to receive. This support can come from friends, parents, or the family, *inter alia*. Boys can use paper cards and write or draw the names to place on the branches at their preference.



Counselling with parents and families

The gender norms and ideas of masculinity affecting the boys are also relevant for the parents. Tacteen Naeil provides follow-up phone sessions and in person counselling and support to parents and families of the survivors to ensure that boys thrive in a caring environment. Counsellors are often times faced with reluctance and resistance from the parents. When boys open up, they tend to talk about their parents and families during counselling sessions. In many cases, boys blame the parents for harsh discipline or fear of reaction to their behaviours or their involvement in situation of online and in person sexual exploitation and abuse. When counsellors feel that the boys' issues originated, or not properly addressed within the family environment⁶, they provide counselling to parents but also refer them⁷ to specialised mental health services.

Counsellors suggest parents to come in and receive counselling. This can be an opportunity to also challenge their gender stereotypes and perceptions, as well as to install a culture of child participation. Changing parents' attitudes and perceptions is challenging and is a long-term process that can be affected by several individual and contextual factors and circumstances.

“It takes a long time to change those perceptions and it is difficult. We talk to the parents frequently, we hear the things the boys tell us and we act like a bridge”.

Sessions with parents tend to be separate from the ones with boys, as the boys struggle to share and open up in the presence of their families. When boys have a good relationship with their parents, the topics of sex and sexuality are still difficult to engage on, as any type of conversation on these themes remains a taboo in the Korean society.

Trying to crack the perception that parents have on male invulnerability and boys' behaviours when it comes to issues of sexual abuse and exploitation can be possible with a mix of counselling and awareness raising with the parents. This means that counsellors of Tacteen Naeil try to provide psychosocial support to parents to understand and elaborate their feelings first, and then use the opportunity to discuss gender norms and ideas. As for the case of boys, parents also know the reason why they are in that room and

⁶ In cases of domestic violence, most boys will ask counsellors not to intervene. If a boy does not want the counsellors to intervene, the staff will not do anything – unless there is a real and urgent danger for the boy. Staff would follow-up by phone with parents and invite them to counselling to be able to assess the situation as a start, without mentioning any concern. During counselling, some parents might start spontaneously to talk about violence in the family and violent discipline;

⁷ Parents and boys can be referred to specialised mental health services.

can also be accompanied by feelings of shame and guilt. It is therefore important to work through these feelings with parents first before and provide them with a safe space to also share their emotions. This contributes to the creation of trust with the counsellors and enables an environment in which parents have the mental and emotional bandwidth to process information on positive discipline and challenging gender norms.

To challenge gender norms, counsellors use different techniques with parents:

1. Tacteen Naeil elaborated a journal of stereotypes related to issues of gender and gender-based violence, which includes common perceptions of the Korean society. The journal is used to ask questions to the parents on how they feel about these common perceptions using a scale from 0 to 5 (0 being strongly disagree, and 5 being strongly agree). Counsellors use their answers to start the conversation and raise awareness on how boys and men can also be at risk of sexual abuse and exploitation, inter alia;
2. Some questions are directly targeted to fathers and specifically those related to ideas on masculinity. Questions like *“who is the breadwinner in the family?”* or *“are men allowed to cry?”* are examples of questions that can be used to assess their level of perception and start the engagement on the topic.

Counselling sessions are also used to share tips and information with parents on child participation and positive discipline. Some parents might want to keep an ideal status of authority with their children, and counsellors discuss this desire by suggesting different parenting styles – explaining why some might work better than others – and especially when it comes to dealing with the emotional consequences of sexual abuse and exploitation. Counsellors use their direct knowledge of their children and how children behave generally in the modern society to show parents that they can provide concrete and helpful advice and support. Counsellors can also organise group parental sessions in which they use evidence, recent statistics and interviews with experts as a way to obtain respect and credibility from the parents. Counsellors found useful to ask directly to parents about their struggles in raising children and in protecting them from potential harms. As a general recommendation, counsellors adopt a sharing attitude, without expressing any form of judgment or assessment attitude during the sessions.

“I am not trying to teach you, I just want to share our own experience. I show them that I have lot of experience with teenagers and can share what I observe with them”.

The human and technical resources needed for implementation

To conduct this work and to be able to have inclusive services for boy survivors, Tacteen Naeil currently counts on a team of four counsellors, two with a degree in counselling and two in youth studies. All counsellors in South Korea need to attend a four-week government mandatory training, which includes themes of counselling for children and adolescents (including cases of online child sexual abuse). In addition, counsellors can access complementary courses organised by the government or other organisations on issues related to sexual and gender-based violence. The government also provides support for the payment of the counsellors' salaries as well as for expenses related to children's access to external legal, medical and mental health services and care. Tacteen Naeil also works in coordination and collaboration with other children's rights organisation and with private companies to refer children to supplementary services or to receive funding for training and educational programmes.

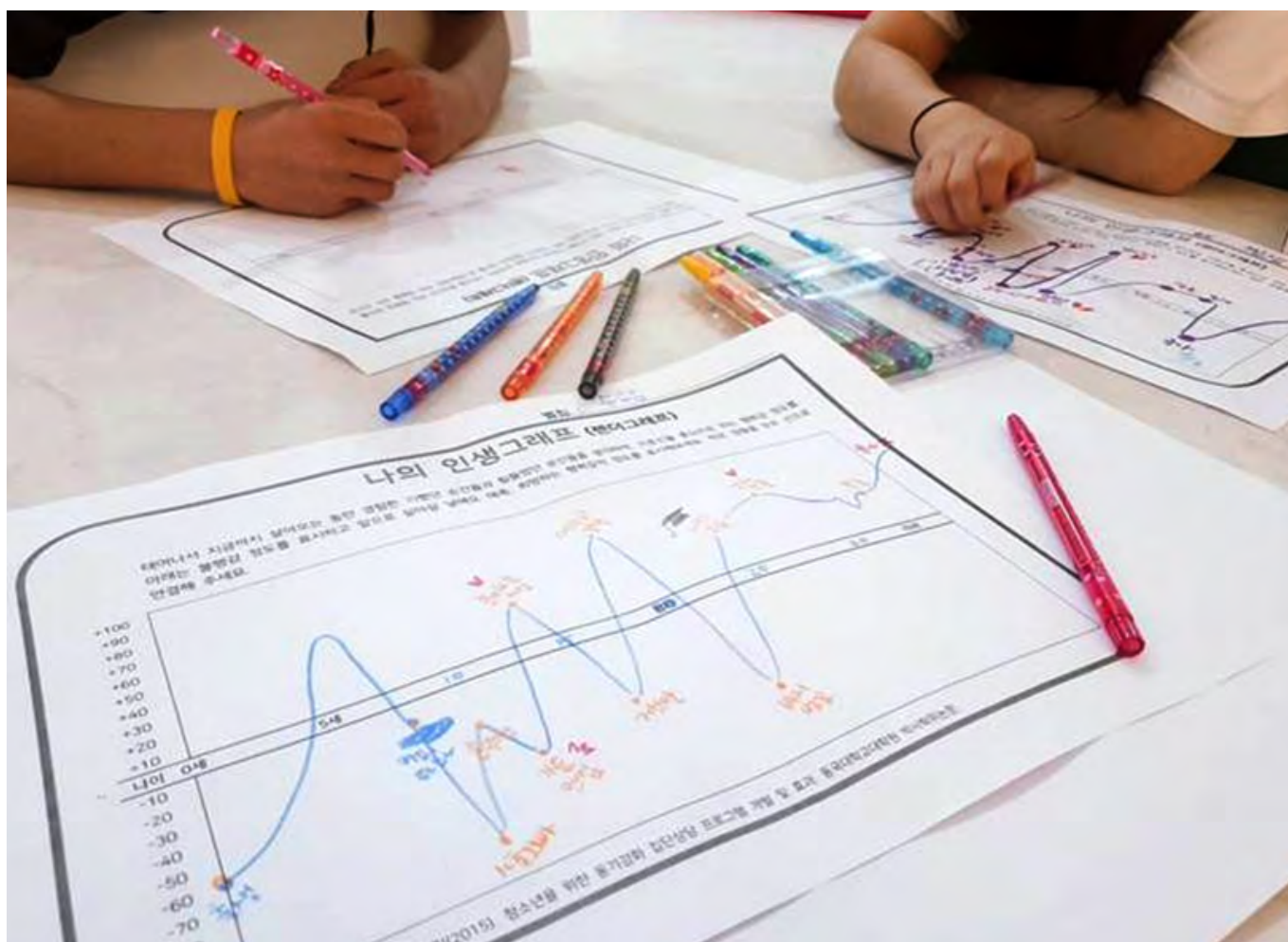
Counsellors at Tacteen Naeil have a caseload of approximately fifteen child protection cases each and benefit from the guidance of a supervisor, who is in charge of assigning cases and providing technical support in their management. Moreover, counsellors hold weekly staff meetings to discuss complex cases and lessons learnt. Every three months, this information is shared with the supervisor to discuss adjustment of services, as relevant. The internal collaboration aspect is essential in the functioning of the team when it comes to complex cases of boys being sexually abused or exploited. Considering that the experience of counsellors in working with boys is quite recent, sharing advice and information on potential alternative approaches was deemed very beneficial in this respect.

“Because we work in the same office, we notice when someone receives a complex cases (on the phone) and we gather to discuss it together as soon as possible”.

Case meetings also represent an opportunity to provide peer support on dealing with the emotional charge inherent to dealing with complex cases. Staff of Tacteen Naeil also found useful to ensure a good balance between professional and personal life and recur to techniques such as journaling to elaborate feelings.

All counsellors at Tacteen Naeil are female, and this comes with advantages and disadvantages. On the latter, some boys might request to speak to a male counsellor over the phone and when this is not possible, they end up hanging up. This showed to the staff the importance of providing different options to boys, but also to be able to refer to other external services where male counsellors are available. On the other hand, the organisation noticed how female counsellors can represent an image of safety amongst boys – and especially when boys have been sexually abused by adult males or live with violent father figures. It is interesting to note how the female team also had to take into account the increasing hostility against feminism movements in Korean society, and especially amongst young boys and men. Indeed, some boys associate female workers in the social welfare field with feminism movements, who are perceived to attack boys and make them feel less⁸. This awareness makes counsellors feel sometimes threatened and in need to take those assumptions away from boys. This adds additional pressure on counsellors, who try to remove that sentiment from boys and use the counselling process as an opportunity to challenge their perceptions on this.

As mentioned previously, the research conducted by Tacteen Naeil in the framework of the ECPAT International Global Boys Initiative provided the opportunity to counsellors to be trained on gender issues and on how to construct activities for boy survivors. The training was constructed with a learning approach, building on each participant's opinions and experiences to challenge internalised gender biases and views. The training modules are still available for the team of Tacteen Naeil and can be used for induction and on boarding purposes for counsellors.



8 It is important to note that this is a biased trend amongst certain adolescent boys in Korean Society and represents sometimes a challenge for the work of Tacteen Naeil. It does not, in any way, represent a criticism of feminist movements – neither in South Korea, nor globally.

Conclusion and possibilities for expansion of work

The experience accumulated by the team of Tacteen Naeil in South Korea in working with boy survivors provides important learnings and insights on how to adjust support services to include boys and to challenge internalised gender biases and beliefs.

The fact that Tacteen Naeil started providing support to boys following the global boys' research represents in itself an important success and learning. Not only the evidence and findings of the research provided the organisation with more technical knowledge on the issue, but it also allowed:

1. Staff to receive specialised training and challenge internalised gender biases and stereotypes, through learning and exchange activities;
2. To develop structured activities to consult with boy survivors during the research phases that could then be adapted as options for in person counselling with boys.

This in turn created additional expertise for the organisation to strengthen its national advocacy on child protection and on the respect and promotion of the human rights of boys. Tacteen Naeil currently counts on solid research and hands-on experience in working with boy survivors that strengthened its credibility amongst policy makers and the wider community. Tacteen Naeil indeed started mainstreaming the issue of the sexual exploitation and abuse of boys in its advocacy and prevention interventions at different levels. For instance, awareness raising and trainings conducted with education personnel in the country schools now integrate components on gender stereotypes and issues of sexual violence against boys – generating, consequently, more reporting from education personnel of cases of boys at risk and boy survivors to Tacteen Naeil. Using data and concrete evidence from direct implementation of services with boys therefore increased awareness and reporting.

“Showing them real examples helps a lot in this sense, we can provide practical tips on how to understand boys’ reactions and when to be concerned”.

The visibility that Tacteen Naeil generated on the issue and the advocacy path started by the organisation led to more awareness and societal debate on the subject and to the potential upcoming opening of the first male survivor support centre in Seoul. In this sense, the adjustments that the organisation had to do in order to work with boy survivors started from a deep internal reflection on internalised gender biases and in an understanding of the impact of gender norms and stereotypes on boys during the support process. The knowledge accumulated could be certainly documented and compiled to design capacity-strengthening modules and interventions to the benefit of other child protection actors.

“Boy survivors themselves try to live up to the social expectations we have for them. We have to change our own perceptions and, at the same time, help the boys escape from those expectations”.

To delve deeper into this

- To know more about the work of Tacteen Naeil in South Korea and obtain more detail on their approach and services, please visit: <http://www.tacteen.net/ecpat>
- To know more about the issue of the sexual exploitation of boys in South Korea, please visit: https://ecpat.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/Global-Boys-Initiative-South-Korea-National-Report_English.pdf
- To better understand the issue of sexual exploitation and abuse of boys and the work of ECPAT International on this at the global level, please visit: <https://ecpat.org/global-boys-initiative/>
- To know more about the work of ECPAT International: <https://ecpat.org/>



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