

LIVE  Q&A





# TRACK 2

## SEXUAL VIOLENCE & BOYS

Chat with

# Camilla Jones

"Caring for boys affected by sexual violence: Tentative findings from a scoping study"

on 19 Sept 2017 at  
8 am NY | 1 pm London  
3 pm Nairobi | 7 pm Bangkok



**Proteknôn** Thank you **Camilla** for making yourself available for this LIVE Q&A. To start off this discussion, I wanted to follow-up with you on the drivers of sexual violence affecting boys. Why do you think so many of these drivers are centered in the family/home?

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**Camilla Jones** Thanks Sara for inviting me to this Q&A!

Most children grow up in their families or family-based care settings. As a result, children learn how to behave and gain their values through the Family. If parents are promoting social norms around gender that are negative this can leave boys vulnerable to sexual abuse or harmful sexual behaviour. For example, when it comes to sexual abuse, a boy's parents may not respond when he tells them that he has been sexually abused as they do not think that it will cause him harm. This can be due to social norms that have led them to understand that boys are stronger and more resilient than girls. This is not the fault of the parents but shows that we need to address social norms. Similarly when it comes to household poverty, this may lead children and parents to make difficult decisions about how a boy can earn a living, again perhaps thinking that a boy is less likely to be harmed by this activity than a girl, but the poverty in itself is not the fault of the parents and needs to be addressed more systematically to prevent parents having to make these difficult choices.

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**Proteknôn** I wonder if you could speak more about how violence and neglect in the home are drivers of sexual violence against boys.

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**Camilla Jones** Abuse and neglect in the home was highlighted as a cause of family separation, which often leads children to be without any adult care on the street, while living with employers etc. This exposes them to high risk of sexual violence. There were a lot of examples of children in these situations experiencing sexual abuse and sexual exploitation and receiving particularly poor responses.

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**Camilla Jones** Some studies also explored the link between poor attachments between children and parents and children seeking out relationships with adults to fill this gap some of which became sexual relationships.

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**Camilla Jones** Of course parents are also responsible for their children in terms of keeping them safe and giving them key life skills. The study shows us how either lack of information prevents them from giving children key life skills, such as how to keep safe online, but also from effectively monitoring their behaviour to keep them safe. Parents who are themselves experiencing difficulties such as drug and alcohol addiction and poverty that forces them to leave the home for work reduces their capacity to care for their children and can cause them to leave their children in risky situations.

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**Camilla Jones** I should say though that we looked at this issue from the perspective of children's care. So there could be a slight bias in the findings towards issues that either source from or can be addressed via families.

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**Proteknôn** Did the research also look at sexual violence of boys in other contexts? Schools?

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**Camilla Jones** If there was a link to children's care then yes but otherwise no as this was beyond the reach of this study. There is a huge amount of literature that focusses on violence in schools but it doesn't always highlight link to children's care as we noted in our report Schools that Care

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**Proteknôn** Here is the report Camilla referred to:

<https://www.familyforeverychild.org/.../A4-Education-Care...>

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**Camilla Jones** One of the hypotheses of the key informants that shared this dynamic is that the behaviour is more a result of unresolved trauma from childhood than the direct experience of sexual abuse

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**Proteknôn** There is the perception that early sexual victimization will lead to the harmful sexual behavior of boys. It was interesting to hear that physical violence could potentially be a greater driver. Why do you think this may be?

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**Camilla Jones** The findings of the study noted that children who display harmful sexual behaviour - particularly the more serious forms that lead them to come into contact with services - have always experienced some kind of abuse or neglect at home. However, they have not always been sexually abused. As you say this is in fact the minority of cases rather than the majority.

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**Proteknôn** There has been some research in the US, linking children who have been through the child welfare system there to greater exposure to sexual and physical violence. For this study, I wonder if you could comment on some of the risks identified within alternative care contexts

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**Camilla Jones** The study found that rates of sexual abuse for children in alternative care are higher than for children living with their parents or usual caregivers. For children in residential care it was noted that in these group settings harmful sexual behaviour between children can take place and often caregivers struggle to know how best to respond. They might fail to take the children seriously. These risks are most pronounced when children who are in residential care for their care and protection are living alongside children in conflict with the law, whose behaviour may be more problematic than for children in the general population, but this was information shared anecdotally by key informants rather than evidenced by research.

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 **Camilla Jones** One of the hypotheses of the key informants that shared this dynamic is that the behaviour is more a result of unresolved trauma from childhood than the direct experience of sexual abuse


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 **Camilla Jones** When it came to children with intellectual disabilities who are a group represented in quite high numbers among children who display harmful sexual behaviour, the study indicated that this could be due to these children not being targeted with sex education and not being able to develop normal relationships with their peers, as well as difficulties with their interpersonal and self-regulation skills.


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 **Proteknôn** I thought this was a connection to yesterday's presentations in terms how children with disabilities are often assumed to be asexual and what programmes could be done to address this misunderstanding and gap

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 **Camilla Jones** Yes sounds like it. I am looking forward to listening to the other presentations next week!

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 **Proteknôn** Dr. Jean Elphick's presentation (<https://youtu.be/QvOIkJyS7EU>) provided very good models of human rights and sex ed through working with parents/caregivers and peer-to-peer education initiatives involving children with disabilities





**Proteknôn** One reason boys are often ignored in terms of the prevention and response to GBV and sexual violence is connected to prevalence - is this something that the scoping study looked into?

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**Camilla Jones** We are still looking at the data that was gathered on prevalence as it was patchy and this made it difficult to draw any concrete conclusions or figures. What is clear is that in some contexts boys have been identified as more affected than girls. For example in a recent VAC study in the Philippines boys self reported sexual abuse at higher rates than girls.

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**Camilla Jones** In certain groups such as street children where boys are already represented in higher numbers than girls we found high rates of sexual violence

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**Proteknôn** Why do you think so little is being done to acknowledge sexual violence against boys within CP?

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**Proteknôn** This is the reply from Camilla: "This is a very difficult question. I think that it is similar to the reason that parents and service providers fail to respond - people simply aren't aware that it can happen or the extent to which it does happen. Due to our historical focus on women and girls a lot of programmes and resources are tailored to meeting their needs. So this can be offputting to boys who want to report. Or it can simply bias the perceptions of service providers. E.g. in Guyana the diagrams used by health professionals to guide their exams of children who have been sexually abused as part of forensic interviewing only have images of girls bodies not of boys."

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**Proteknôn** Thank you so much **Camilla** for taking this time to answer some of these questions! We really appreciate this!

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**Proteknôn** From **Camilla**: "I'm really looking forward to being able to share the full report and to be able to share the full detail!"

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