# Child Sexual Abuse
## in the Eastern Caribbean

*Perceptions of,* **Attitudes to,** and **Opinions on** Child Sexual Abuse in the Eastern Caribbean

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# FOREWORD

## FOR CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE STUDY

The UNICEF Office for Barbados and the Eastern Caribbean is pleased to present this synopsis on the landmark study "Perceptions of, Attitudes to and Opinions on Child Sexual Abuse in the Eastern Caribbean".

Commissioned by this Office, in a joint programming initiative with UNIFEM, this very important study was undertaken by the University of Huddersfield and Action for Children, with partial funding from the UK Department for International Development.

While not designed to measure the prevalence of child sexual abuse, the researchers have unearthed an alarming picture of a social problem which is perceived to be escalating; has increasingly severe consequences for Caribbean societies; and has multiple layers.

The picture from the study which was carried out in six Eastern Caribbean countries is not a pretty one. However, we see it as the first important step in the process of addressing what we now clearly recognize as a growing problem in our sub region.

At UNICEF we have always believed that we must have an evidence-based approach to support our partners in the delivery of programmes to ensure a protective environment for children in the sub region. In this vein this study will assist in filling some of the research gaps which previously prevented stakeholders from designing holistic programmes to begin tackling this problem.

This study will give impetus to the work which Governments of the Eastern Caribbean and UNICEF have committed to in our joint work plan for 2008-2011. The programmes being executed to stem the tide of violence against children are in recognition that it is critical that our young citizens be provided with a safe environment if we are to create a Caribbean Fit for Children.

Even strong, healthy children can be victims of abuse. A well nourished and immunized child who is beaten is not a healthy child. A young girl in a school anywhere in Barbados and the Eastern Caribbean is unlikely to fulfill her learning potential if she is sexually abused at home.

Here in the region and globally UNICEF helps to create a protective environment for children and one that fortifies them against abuse in the same way that good nutrition and adequate health care fortify them against disease. Creating this protective environment is the best chance we have of safeguarding all children.

It is the responsibility not only of governments, but of every member of society to work towards the attainment of this protective environment.
It is our sincere wish that as we read through this report we commit ourselves to tackling the scourge of child sexual abuse. We owe it to our children.
Indifference on our part can no longer be tolerated. Our children need to grow up in a secure and healthy environment and reach their full potential.

**Tom Olsen**
UNICEF Representative,
Barbados and the Eastern Caribbean
*May 2010*

# Child

## Sexual Abuse
## in the
## Eastern Caribbean

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Perceptions of,

Attitudes to,

and Opinions

on Child Sexual Abuse

in the Eastern Caribbean

# Introduction

**This was a landmark study in that it was the first time that a comprehensive investigation of attitudes towards child sexual abuse had been carried out across several Caribbean countries. It was also unique because it was underpinned by the philosophy that policy and programmes for dealing with child sexual abuse should be relevant to the cultural and social context in which abuse occurs. This study aimed to understand how Caribbean people perceive the problem of child sexual abuse: what behaviours and social conditions contribute to it: what is the impact of child sexual abuse on those most affected and what views are held about the forms of action that might be needed to prevent it and to heal those affected.**

## Objectives

### The objectives of the study were to:

w Increase understanding of the perceptions and behaviours associated with child sexual abuse, including incest, within the cultural contexts of the Eastern Caribbean region.

w Increase research capacity in the Eastern Caribbean into issues affecting children.

w Provide baseline data on perceptions on the scale of the problem within the region.

w Investigate the manifestations of child sexual abuse across diverse ethnic; religious, and socioeconomic groups.

w Sensitise stakeholders to the socio-cultural and psycho-social issues; underlying child sexual abuse.

w Develop partnerships with key stakeholders and professionals in order to enhance country and regional capacity for addressing child sexual abuse and addressing its psychosocial effects.

w Identify inter-country and country-specific policies and strategies for reducing child sexual abuse.

w Contribute to the establishment of a shared language on the definition of child sexual abuse and to regional partnerships and consensus on what needs to be done to address the problem within Caribbean contexts.

w Make recommendations for the development of relevant policy, protocols and programming.

## Participating Countries

The six countries selected for inclusion in the study, to reflect regional representation and diversity, were: Anguilla, Barbados, Dominica, Grenada, Montserrat, and St. Kitts and Nevis.

## Methodology

People's perceptions of child sexual abuse were explored by means of a community survey and focus group discussions. Because of the small sample size in each country, it is not possible to draw any reliable statistical conclusions about the specific responses given to any question in an individual country or social grouping. However, the conclusions for the Eastern Caribbean region as a whole are reliable indicators of both people's perceptions and the real incidence of child sexual abuse.

### Focus Groups

Focus group discussions were carried out in each of the six countries involved in the project. Focus group discussion topics were drawn from the research questions and explored people's views about definitions of abuse, their own experiences of

abuse (and of others they knew), reflections on how wide-spread and common sexual abuse might be. The groups also identified the type of services and responses needed. The aim of the focus groups was to provide depth of understanding and to enable people to discuss their actual experiences.

Participants were selected from a representative range of backgrounds (community and religious groups, youth groups, sports groups, employment settings, institutions, further education settings).

Two hundred and eighty people participated in thirty-five focus groups; respondents were evenly split in terms of gender. There were several gender specific groups as well as mixed gender groups that cut across age and socio-economic status.

## Interviews with policy makers and practitioners

In addition, forty-two policy-focused interviews and sixty-eight practice-focused interviews were carried out in the participating countries, to identify more specific concerns and interventions from people who deal professionally with aspects of child sexual abuse. Interviewees included medical and legal professionals, child protection officers, social workers, counsellors, Permanent Secretaries and other policy advisers, teachers, police, health professionals, and officials from NGOs and FBOs.

## Stakeholders meetings

Meetings with stakeholders were held in each country. Stakeholder groups included parents, children, government Ministers, NGOs, Faith Based Organisations, professionals (teachers, health workers, social workers, police) and the media. Efforts were made to balance participation between women and men. The purpose was to sensitise people to the study, to obtain information about issues of most concern, to elicit support for the study, to obtain information on key agencies, and to identify factors specific to particular countries.

## Interviews with Survivors

An important part of the study involved talking to adult survivors of child sexual abuse in order to explore the extent of the effects of abuse and the complexities of the issues involved. The hope was that the researchers could learn about resilience and coping strategies.

# Defining Child Sexual Abuse in the Eastern Caribbean

The researchers developed definitions for child sexual abuse as it is experienced in the Eastern Caribbean, both in terms of the behaviours that constitute such abuse and the definition of who is a child.

Most definitions of child sexual abuse are based on the recognition that sexual activity between an adult and a child or between a young person and a younger child is a violation of the rights and personhood of the child, often with severe and long-lasting psychosocial consequences. It also recognises that the coercion and betrayal of trust involved in most acts of child sexual abuse is deeply destructive to both child and family.

## Participants' Perceptions Of What Constitute Child Sexual Abuse

From the responses to the survey questionnaire, and the comments made by participants in the focus groups and in the interviews with policy-makers and practitioners, the researchers found a range of perceptions of sexual abuse of children. There was consensus from all respondents that some types of behaviour are abuse, such as rape of a minor and incest. However, respondents differed in their views about other forms of abuse. For some people, sexual abuse was any type of sexualised activity that involves a child, even if no act is committed against the child and even if there is no intent to harm the child. At the other end of the spectrum, some respondents did not think that men having sex with 'consenting' underage teenagers for money or material goods was sexual abuse and suggested that at the level of the general public, many people might regard this behaviour as wrong, but not sexual abuse.

## Categories Of Behaviours That Could Be Examined Within The Context Of Child Abuse

*For purposes of the study, the researchers developed three categories of behaviour that could be examined in the context of child sexual abuse.*

**Child sexual abuse** was clarified as a range of specific acts that may or may not involve actual physical contact.

---

*Box 1*

### Child Sexual Abuse

v Rape, forced and 'consensual' sexual intercourse with a minor

v Incest

v Children used as sexual objects in videos, photos or as pimps

v Exposure to sexual materials through different media, e.g. radio, photos, movies, text, mobile telephone, Internet, parent/adult sexual toys, sexual DVDs

v Exposing the child to the sexual act deliberately or unknowingly

v Uncomfortable or intrusive touching of a child

**Harmful Sexual Behaviour** was seen as consisting of actions involving children which placed them at risk of sexual abuse. These behaviours were often thought to be related to sexual abuse in that they indicated early sexual initiation of children (which itself is linked to sexual abuse) or that they were the antecedents of abuse.

*Box 2*

## Harmful Sexual Behaviour

v   Young people engaging in transactional sex with each other

v   Encouraging young people to have underage sex

v   Invading the child's privacy, peeping while child undresses or bathes

v   Use of sexual language to, and in front of, a child

v   Inappropriate touching (not clarified)

v   Looking at children inappropriately (not clarified)

v   Child overhearing sexual language

v   Obsessive watching of child

v   Watching nude or partially nude pictures of the child

**Behaviour that contributes to the sexual harming of children** was defined mostly in terms of failures to protect children from sexual abuse or failure to deal with allegations of sexual abuse of children. Family members and social service authorities could be equally implicated in these behaviours.

*Box 3*

## Behaviour that Contributes To the Sexual Harming of Children

v   Sex between young people, at least one below the age of consent

v   Young people engaging in transactional sex with each other

v   Young people distributing sexually explicit images of themselves

v   Young people using technology for sexual experimentation and exploration

## Who Is Considered To Be A Child?

**"The age of consent is 16 and marriage without parental consent is 21. That is too wide a gap".**
*Focus Group Participant - Grenada*

**Understanding child sexual abuse begins with agreement about who is a child. Survey participants were** asked several questions to help clarify their understanding of when childhood ends. Most survey participants agreed that age was the clearest marker of childhood. More than half thought that the end of childhood came at the age of 16, and more than three quarters agreed that childhood had certainly ended by age 18. Smaller percentages thought that childhood ended at age 13, or when puberty began for both boys and girls.

## Legal Definitions versus Context and Behaviour

Some variations in attitudes were revealed in individual focus groups. The group that comprised of police officers in Grenada, for example, maintained a strict adherence to the legal definition of age of consent as a determinate of whether the sexual activity constituted child sexual abuse. Other groups placed greater emphasis on context and behaviour. Several felt that the age of consent, set at 16 years, was too low and should be raised to 18. At the same time, focus group members noted that sexual activity between children can start much earlier. They made a distinction between "experimenting" between children of similar ages and "abuse", involving adults and children.

## Did Becoming A Teen Mother Changed Participants' Views Of Who Is A Child?

While sexual activity was not considered a particularly significant marker of the end of childhood, it was a different matter if the sexual experience led to pregnancy.

Once a girl became pregnant, twice as many people thought this marked the end of childhood than if she had had sex without becoming pregnant, even though the majority of respondents did not agree with either of these statements.

For a significant number of people however, the state of motherhood was not considered compatible with the status of childhood. This highlighted the contradictions and dilemmas that many teenage mothers face.

## Age and Sexual Activity

Interesting perspectives on the ages at which children become sexually active came from some focus groups. Although the general perception was that children were engaging in sexual activity at an earlier age now than in the past, anecdotal evidence from some participants (for example from a focus group in Grenada) showed that early sexual activity was a phenomenon in past generations as well.

The focus groups in St. Kitts and Nevis identified a pattern of sexual initiation, whether in the form of seductive dancing and talking or engaging in sexual intercourse, that frequently occurs at an early age. They saw a disconnect between the age of consent for sexual intercourse and what actually occurs. Many participants believed that children are over-sexualised from the age of 4 or 5 to adolescence. For those homes in St. Kitts which consisted only of one bedroom, according to participants, children are often put on the floor or in closets while their parents engage in sexual activity.

> "Sometimes I had a strong feeling that what surfaced in the court was just a very small percentage of what goes on every day and will never reach a probation officer, a welfare officer, or the Child Care Board. I always had a feeling we were not getting to the problem".
> *Practitioner - Barbados*

By society's normalisation of the over-sexualising of children, the moral code of those children themselves seemed to have shifted into one that is more condoning of sexual activity.

## Incidence of Child Sexual Abuse

Child sexual abuse occurs in all countries, and across all racial, ethnic, religious and socioeconomic groups. It is far more common than previously thought and affects children of all ages, including infants.  Both boys and girls are sexually abused, although in all reported studies girls outnumber boys.  Although sexual abuse can occur as a single phenomenon, the presence and interplay of other social factors may indicate increased risk.
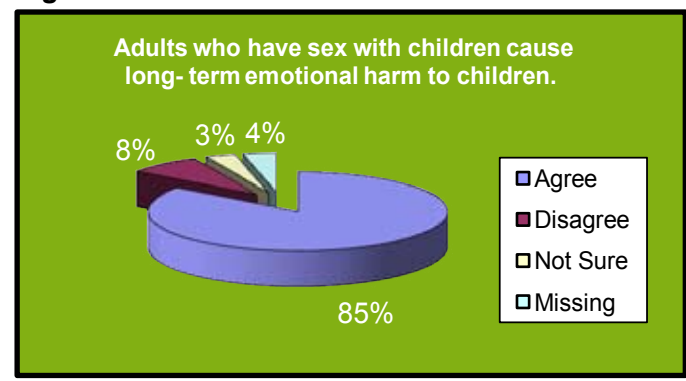
These factors include:
- v  social norms based on patriarchal values,
- v  domestic violence,
- v  family history of sexual abuse,
- v  status of children,
- v  cultural perceptions and attitudes to abuse,
- v  substance abuse,
- v  witnessing abuse,
- v  low socio-economic status (particularly where this leads to the economic dependence of women), gender inequality and lack of social supports.

### Child sexual abuse under-reported

Policy and practitioner interviews in Barbados, for example, exposed the difficulty of determining the actual incidence of child sexual abuse, recognising that the situation is characterised by persistent under-reporting. Reasons suggested for under-reporting included shame and embarrassment, fear of the abuser and of possible reprisal, reluctance on the part of the family to admit what had happened, and the belief on the part of many victims that the veracity of their story would be questioned.

*Figure 1*



Adults who have sex with children cause long-term emotional harm to children.

- 8%
- 3%
- 4%
- 85%
- Agree
- Disagree
- Not Sure
- Missing

All focus groups in the six participating countries agreed that sexual abuse of children was widespread in their societies. All groups could cite examples and provide anecdotal evidence to support the general prevalence of child sexual abuse.  The practitioners from Grenada thought that child sexual abuse had reached alarmingly high rates, although interviewees acknowledged that there were no empirical data to support this perception.

## Attitudes to Sexual Activity Between Adults and Children

### Child sexual abuse generally viewed as  un-acceptable

The great majority of people questioned (86.4 percent) thought that children were damaged by

*Figure 2*



"Sexual activity between adults and children is never OK, no matter what."

- 17%
- 2%
- 5%
- 76%
- Agree
- Disagree
- Not Sure
- Missing
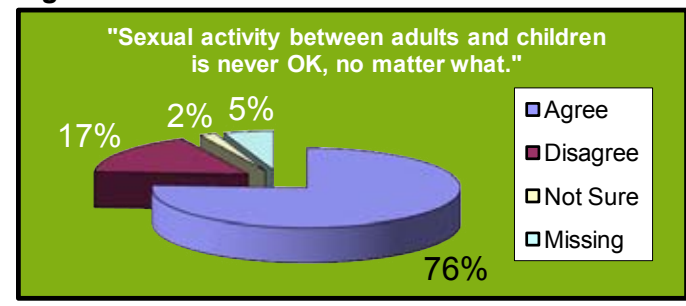
sexual activity with adults even in situations in which the child felt loved by the abuser.

Most respondents (76 percent) thought that sexual activity between adults and children was never acceptable no matter what the circumstances. However, 17 percent of respondents thought there were circumstances when sexual activity between adults and children was okay. (The remaining 5.2 percent were not sure.) These responses did not show any variation among the different socio-economic classes, degree of religious conviction, or level of education. Of those who disagreed with the statement, people from rural communities outnumbered those from urban communities by 2:1.

## Under some circumstances child sexual abuse was perceived as normal or acceptable

For the focus groups in Barbados, the involvement of older men in sexual relationships with female minors was seen as so widespread that it could be described as 'normal'. The majority of these relationships were viewed as 'consensual', and did not seem to most participants to be worth reporting.

Another instance where sex between adults and children was thought to be acceptable was sex between boys and adult women. This was seen as an acceptable form of sexual initiation for the boys, who did not see themselves as victims of abuse.

## Intergenerational Effects of Child Sexual Abuse

## Perpetrators were sometimes viewed as victims of abuse themselves

About half the survey respondents thought that men who sexually abuse children had been sexually

abused themselves. Women were twice as likely to think this as men. A similar response was reported in relation to women who sexually abuse children. This finding suggests that people see that abuse is both cyclical and intergenerational and suggests that the link between being abused and becoming an abuser may be underpinned by the socialisation of the child.

In Barbados, practitioners expressed concern about the number of women who were abused as children and still suffering the consequences of sexual abuse. Focus groups in Anguilla supported the idea that adults who abuse children have often themselves experienced sexual abuse when they were children, citing specific anecdotal examples to support that position.
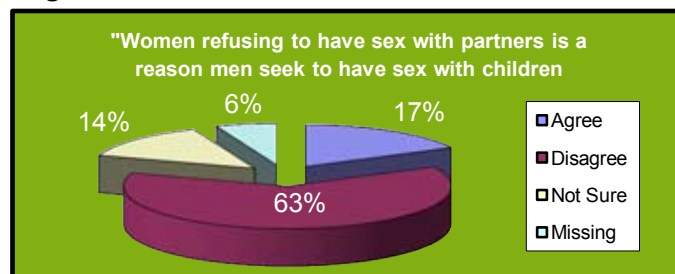
## Risk Factors

## Poverty is a precursor to child sexual abuse

Although most participants could agree that child sexual abuse occurred at all socio-economic levels, there was a general sense in focus groups from all countries in the study that poverty is a precursor to child sexual abuse. Focus groups in Grenada recognised that poverty would not, of itself,

> **"Money, poverty, greediness… this is the cause of child sexual abuse".**
> *Focus Group Participant - Barbados*

*Figure 3*



"Women refusing to have sex with partners is a reason men seek to have sex with children

- Agree 17%
- Disagree 63%
- Not Sure 14%
- Missing 6%

trigger the abuse. The practitioners interviewed in Barbados cited poverty for the conditions it created. Poor or inadequate sleeping arrangements were seen by practitioners everywhere as leading to overcrowding and the sharing of beds, factors which could lead to inappropriate sexual behaviours. Overcrowding, in particular, was seen as crucial: the physical proximity of adult males (in most cases step-fathers) to their step-daughters increased the risk that these girls would be abused.

## Gender Inequality a factor Leading To Child Sexual Abuse

For focus groups in Grenada, gender inequalities were also identified as an element in causing child abuse. In all participating countries, there was a common perception that women find themselves torn between the need to protect their children and the need to provide for economic survival. Patriarchal attitudes, by which men have control over their children can also create conditions in which child sexual abuse occurs.

Gender inequality, however, also affects the attitudes to and treatment of boys who may be victims of sexual abuse and adult women who may be perpetrators of sexual abuse of children.

Most people (62.6 percent) did not accept that women refusing to have sex with partners was a reason for men to have sex with children, although a significant proportion of respondents did think this (17.5 percent).

## Lack Of Social Support For Working Mothers

Respondents in many countries identified inadequate parental supervision as a causal factor, especially with regard to mothers who were working late at night and allowing children to be supervised by their partners or boyfriends. Lack of

social support for families was seen by practitioners in St. Kitts and Nevis not as a cause of child sexual abuse, but as a factor that seems to create conditions in which the abuse can take place more easily.

## Pornography and Technology

Access to pornographic television programmes was identified as a factor in child sexual abuse by several respondents in various countries. Many focus groups and practitioner interviewees expressed the view that child sexual abuse is promoted by the Internet and mobile telephones, which were seen as purveyors of child pornography as well as encouraging children themselves to be more sexually active.

## Drugs and Alcohol

The use of drugs and alcohol, while not viewed as a major factor influencing child abuse, was found to be an underlying cause in some instances. The focus groups in Anguilla also saw Carnival time as particularly dangerous for children at risk of sexual abuse. In Barbados, focus groups identified the ability of minors to access alcohol easily as a factor which could lead to child sexual abuse.

> **"All ages can go to the same disco and no control over drinking. Drinking is a part of the problem".**
> *Focus Group Participant - Anguilla*

## Natural Disasters

The policy and practitioner interviews in Grenada raised the question of how natural disasters (Hurricane Ivan, in the case of Grenada) affected the prevalence and awareness of child sexual abuse. One view was that child abuse and neglect

became more visible in the aftermath of the hurricane, with the 'fallout' effects of that disaster still lingering in the society five years after the event. One person spoke of an apparent increase in 'transactional sex' and sexual exploitation of young people. Others were of the opinion that the physical destruction of family houses across the island gave more visibility to the plight of abused children, including sexual abuse, because the walls had broken down both literally and metaphorically speaking. Services were sought by many families that had previously not come to the attention of authorities and this brought many cases of child abuse to the surface.

## Tourism As A Possible Source Of Child Sex Abuse

Anecdotal evidence provided by the focus groups and policy/practitioner interviews indicated a growing concern about tourism as a possible source of child sexual abuse, although there is no strong statistical evidence and most respondents considered this a much less significant source of child sexual abuse than the family and community.

## Perceptions Attitudes and Opinions on Child Sexual Abuse in Families

## Child Sexual Abuse Most Likely To Take Place in the Family

Close to half the survey respondents (40.9 percent) considered that child sexual abuse is more likely to occur within the family.

While it was acknowledged that most people who sexually abuse children are men, respondents also made it clear that they thought women too could be abusers.

**The primary perpetrators of sexual abuse of children were seen to be the partners of the children's mothers, either their husbands or their boyfriends**

More than half of the respondents (53.6 percent) thought that step-fathers were more likely than biological fathers to sexually abuse children in the family, although a quarter of respondents did not believe this. Almost half (47 percent) of the respondents thought the most likely person to abuse a child was the mother's boyfriend.

These responses were confirmed by all the focus groups and practitioners interviewed in all six participating countries. In all cases, the primary perpetrators of sexual abuse of children were seen to be the partners of the children's mothers, either their husbands or their boyfriends. Step-fathers and boyfriends were thought to be much more likely than natural fathers to abuse the children in their households.

## Reasons For Child Sexual Abuse within Families

The focus groups in Anguilla saw lack of parental supervision as a factor in the sexual abuse of their children, noting that children were often left on their own, with no structure or guidance in their lives. Practitioners in Barbados identified single parent families and the presence of a step-father or boyfriend in an unstable family situation, allowing a succession of partners into the house without much, if any prior knowledge of character, as a factor in child sexual abuse.
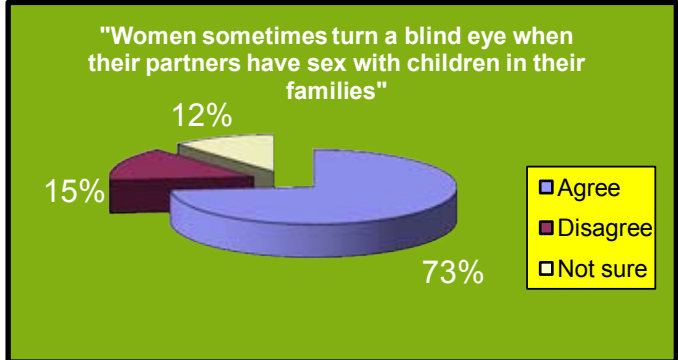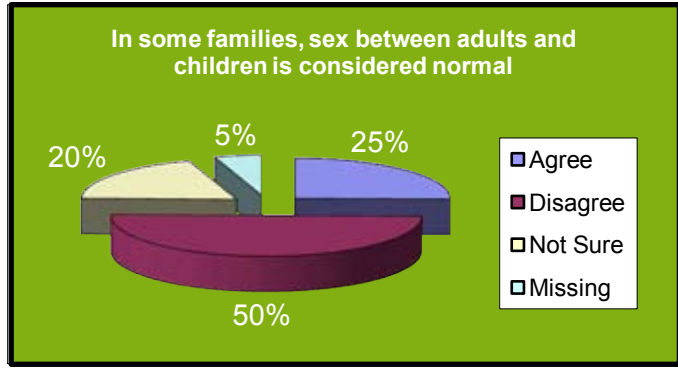
## Mothers also contributed to the abuse

The majority of respondents (70.2 percent) believed that 'women sometimes turn a 'blind eye' when their partners have sex with children in their families'.

*Figure 4*



"Women sometimes turn a blind eye when their partners have sex with children in their families"

- 12%
- 15%
- 73%
- Agree
- Disagree
- Not sure

Practitioners interviewed in Barbados, for example, severely criticised mothers for what was seen as their contributory role in the perpetuation of child sexual abuse. In St. Kitts and Nevis, the focus groups clearly implicated mothers in the sexual abuse of their children. Some participants believed that mothers complied with the men's requests only for monetary compensation, while others believed this occurred because of shame, fear, distrust in the legal and justice systems and love for her partner. Practitioners in St. Kitts and Nevis raised that possibility that mothers kept silent for economic

*Figure 5*



In some families, sex between adults and children is considered normal

- 5%
- 20%
- 25%
- 50%
- Agree
- Disagree
- Not Sure
- Missing

reasons. Participants suggested that it was quite common for mothers to 'take pay-outs' from the perpetrators of Child Sexual Abuse to discontinue any legal action if a charge had been made, or to remain silent.

### The mothers of abused children were seen as having failed to protect their children

There was little empathy for mothers involved in situations of child sexual abuse. The mothers of abused children were seen as having failed to protect their children, or being rivals of their daughters for the abuser's affection, or even abusers themselves of their children. For some focus group members, mothers were firmly established among the culpable and it was expected that they would soon be penalised along with fathers if they did not cooperate with police and other authorities responding to allegations of child sexual abuse.

The focus groups in Dominica were especially insistent that mothers played a major role in exposing their children to sexual abuse. Many groups throughout the region expressed the view that mothers who, for whatever reason, allowed their children to be sexually abused, were equally guilty and should be punished severely.

## Views on Incest

The overwhelming percentage (84.1 percent) of survey respondents did not accept a statement that sex between children and adults had become established as a pattern in some families without causing apparent harm.

However, there was cause for concern in the fact that even a small number of people (5.5 percent)

saw nothing wrong with incest. Of those, more than twice as many women as men thought that inter-generational sex within a family was acceptable, and it was also a concern to note that respondents who had children less that 16 years of age were more likely to agree with the statement than respondents who did not have children of this age.

In spite of the position that sexual activity between adults and children was not acceptable, a significant  percentage of respondents considered that there were families in which this practice was normalised.

Similar numbers were found when survey respondents were asked whether they though the sex between brothers and sisters was normal in some families.

*Figure 6*



In some families, sex between brothers and sisters is considered normal

17%  4%  22%  57%

Agree / Disagree / Not Sure / Missing
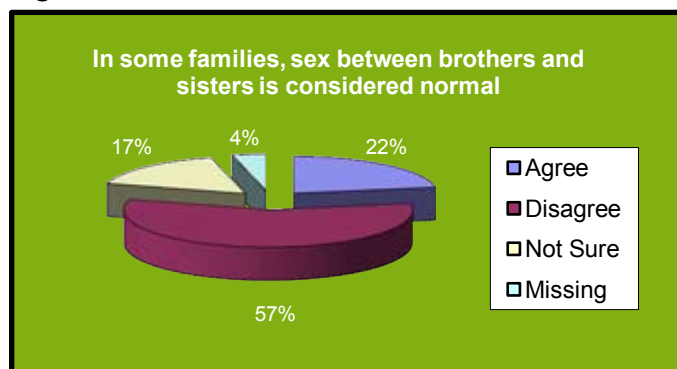
The practitioners in Grenada considered that incest was the most common form of sexual abuse of children, with step-fathers as the primary category

of perpetrator, although fathers, uncles and brothers were also implicated. Mothers were seen as enablers and accomplices in some cases.

## Incest concealed by a  Cloak of Silence

For the focus groups and the practitioners interviewed in Barbados, incest was viewed as prevalent throughout the society but it was felt that such acts were commonly concealed under a 'cloak of silence'.  Incestuous relationships were thought to be kept hidden because of the shame and disgrace which accompanied their exposure. It was suggested that in some instances these relationships were only revealed when a pregnancy occurred.  Focus groups in Dominica identified secrecy as a major impediment to addressing incest.

## Complicated Family Structures contributed to incest

Focus groups in Montserrat identified complications in family structures as a factor in incest. When men fathered children with many different women, and women had children by different fathers, people might not always be aware of who was related to whom, and might therefore unknowingly engage in sexual relations with close relatives. For focus groups in St. Kitts and Nevis, the most significant incidence of abuse of children was by step-fathers, or the mothers' boyfriends.
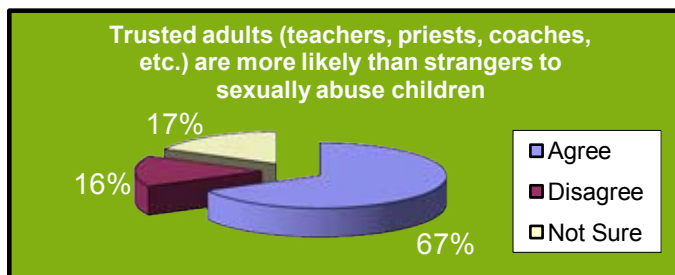
## Perceptions, attitudes and opinions on Sexual Abuse in the Community

### Trusted Adults In The Community Were Sometimes The Perpetrators

Although it was generally believed that sexual abuse of children was to be found primarily within the ambit of the family, the participants in the study also identified community situations in which children were abused sexually.

*Figure 7*



Trusted adults (teachers, priests, coaches, etc.) are more likely than strangers to sexually abuse children

- Agree 67%
- Disagree 16%
- Not Sure 17%

Two-thirds of the respondents to the survey questionnaire (67.3 percent) thought that trusted adults (such as teachers, priests, and coaches) were more likely than strangers to sexually abuse children.

In Grenada, focus groups and practitioners identified bus drivers and conductors as major offenders. Interestingly, the police officer group in Grenada was defensive about how they were perceived in the community, strongly denying that there was a disproportionate number of police officers who were sexually involved with young girls.

It was also felt that men used their status within the community to influence people in positions of authority to ignore the abuse, to pay off victim's families or to intimidate families into keeping the secret. Men were described as considering themselves immune from detection and prosecution and were often very plausible and convincing.

In many of the experiences described people in positions of authority; i.e. doctors, police, teachers etc. had been aware of what was going on and had done nothing.

### Views On Transactional Sexual Abuse

A particular issue of concern in the Eastern Caribbean region is transactional sexual abuse. which involves 'consenting' teenage girls and older men in transactions by which sex is exchanged for money, goods, and favours. Focus groups in all participating countries agreed that this was a growing phenomenon in the region.

Most of the practitioners interviewed in Dominica indicated that sex between young teenage girls and adult men was the most common sort of child sexual abuse encountered in their practices. They asserted that, even though the practice may be somewhat condoned by society, it still involves the sexual abuse of a minor. Poverty was resoundingly rejected as a justifiable reason for the exploitation of girls in this way.

> **"It is more tolerated in society if the man or abuser is of a certain stature".**
> *Focus Group Participant - Anguilla*

## Mothers Encouraged Transactional Sexual Relationships

The commonly held view that some women allow or do not prevent their daughters from having sex with men if it brings money into the household was rejected by some groups. In other groups, however, mothers were blamed quite harshly for their role in 'permitting' and even encouraging their daughters to engage in these exploitative relationships. The small minority of respondents who thought that this practice was acceptable raised some concern.

Men were three times as likely as women to state that this was acceptable (9.6 percent of men thought this, compared to 2.9 percent of women). This finding suggests that, for a minority of people, the issue of family survival is more important than protecting girl children from being exploited by adult males.

## Sex For Money

Among the focus groups in Anguilla, there was consensus regarding toleration of older men engaging in sexual activity with young girls. They acknowledged that it was common for young girls to engage in sex and sexual activity for money, often with the knowledge, consent and sometimes at the initiation of the mother. Sex for money was

*Figure 8*



"Poverty is a justifiable reason for commercial sexual exploitation of girls."

- Agree
- Disagree
- Not Sure
- Missing

2% 3% 2%
93%

spoken of as a matter of fact by all groups, though 'vanity'/materialism was sometimes given as the reason, not just economic need.

## Patriarchal System & Economical Survival

The focus group discussions in Dominica revealed the general perception that sex between secondary school aged girls (13 to 16 years old) and adult men is widely accepted in Dominican society. This situation was mainly viewed as a matter for the parents/families of the child to deal with.

Focus groups in Grenada explored the broader socio-cultural bases for this activity. They identified an active system of patriarchy in Grenada, in which historical power imbalances afforded men more power and more material benefit. Women did not see themselves as involved in 'prostitution' per se, or doing sex work at all, but as strategic players in a pattern of life that sometimes included an explicit sexual/financial dimension. These gendered 'norms' were seen as so prevalent that they in turn influenced and reinforced the patriarchal institutions that created the imbalances in the first place.

For focus groups in St. Kitts and Nevis, the element of economic survival was paramount. Women and their daughters often depend financially on men for their survival, whether it is the mother's partner or another adult male. In exchange for silence and sex, many of these men contribute money to rent, groceries and school books.
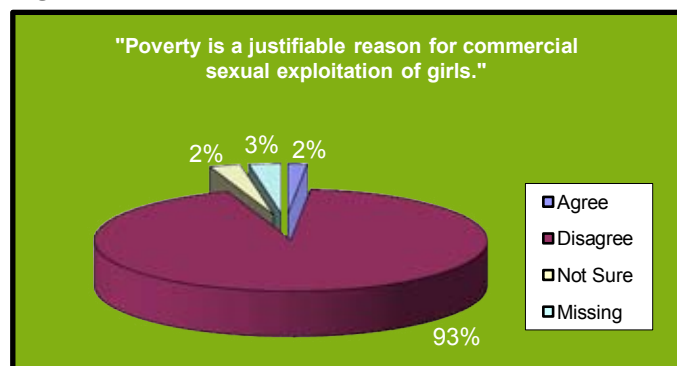
## Young girls sometimes contributed to the abuse

There was a dominant perception that men are weak and easily tempted, perhaps not able to control themselves. This also suggested that girls are held to be partially responsible for men's behaviour because of the way they

dress. For many, the very fact of girls' physical/ sexual development was a contributing factor to sexual abuse. It was also clear that respondents considered sexual attraction to be a contributing factor and not a cause of child sexual abuse and that even not  being considered attractive would not prevent girls from being abused.

*Figure 9*
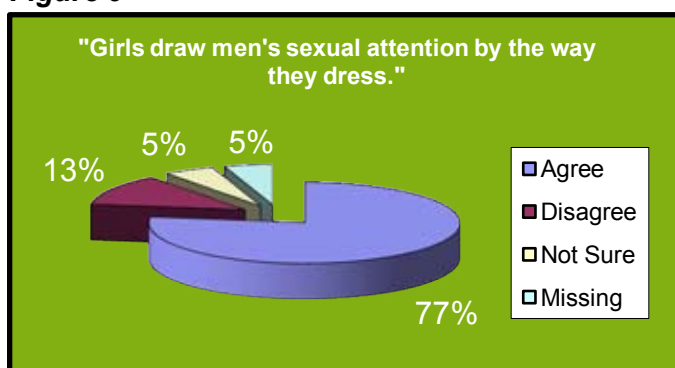


All focus groups in Barbados supported the notion that the manner of dress was an influence in promoting sexual relations between girls and older men.

## Sexually Aggressive Girls
## A Contributing  Factor.

Males in many focus groups identified the presence of aggressive female minors as a cause of sexual abuse.  Groups in Grenada in which women predominated, however, demonstrated a growing sentiment that children, especially girls, were becoming more sexually aggressive, promiscuous and certainly sexually aware.  This was seen as a product of increasingly sexualized media. Practitioners in Grenada also had less empathy for girls who were involved in consensual relationships with older men because of the perception that it was 'self-serving', and sometimes actively encouraged by the young girls themselves.

Young girls who appeared older, in many situations convinced their male suitors of this.  These girls were described as 'womanish and uppity' and, correspondingly, men who thought they were 'womanish and hot' rose to the challenge. While there was acknowledgement by females in the focus groups that there were aggressive female minors in society, it was generally thought that once the age of the female was revealed, the adult male should walk away.

## Perception, Attitudes, And Opinions about Sexual Abuse Of Boys

> **"I am hoping that going forward we do not commit the cardinal sin that 'victim' equals 'female'. As difficult as it is for girls to come forward it is even worse for boys because of our social mores".**
> *Practitioner - Anguilla*

The policy and practitioner interviewees in Anguilla were clear that most abusers are men and most victims are women, but they were concerned not to minimise the experiences of boys who were abused and the role of women who abuse.  Almost all practitioners indicated that there would be no differences in their responses if the abused children were boys.  However, regardless of age, there also seemed to be differentiation in the response depending on the sex of the child abused and of the adult abuser.  When the adult involved was female there was indeed some hesitation to consider this in the realm of child sexual abuse.
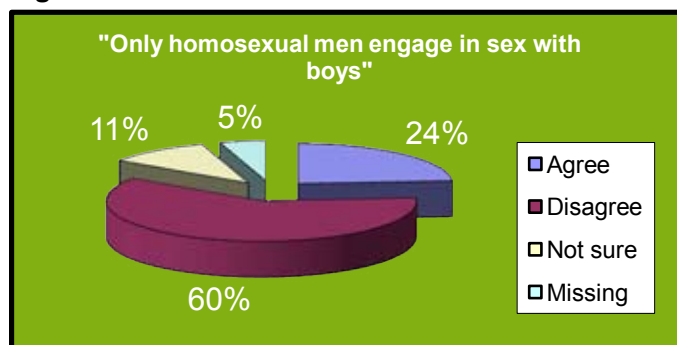
In Barbados, the focus groups thought that sexually abused boys were neglected despite the reality that these male 'victims' suffered the same harmful emotional effects as their female counterparts. Practitioners in Grenada saw an increasing trend in sexual offences involving boys.

Almost a quarter of survey respondents agreed with the statement that 'Only homosexual men engage in sex with boys' and men were more likely to think that only homosexual men abused children than women. At the same time, 42.7 percent of respondents thought that sexual abuse

*Figure 10*



**"Only homosexual men engage in sex with boys"**

- 11%
- 5%
- 24%
- 60%

☐ Agree
☐ Disagree
☐ Not sure
☐ Missing

**it is a commonly held belief that sexual abuse of a child by someone of the same gender will influence the child's sexual orientation**

of a boy by a man would lead to the boy becoming a homosexual, and 31.4 percent also thought that sexual abuse of a girl by a woman would lead to the girl becoming a lesbian.

These overall findings suggest that it is a commonly held belief that sexual abuse of a child by someone of the same gender will influence the child's sexual orientation. However, people with higher levels of education were less likely to believe

that sexual abuse by someone of the same gender would influence sexual orientation.

Practitioners interviewed in Anguilla recognised that attitudes to male homosexuality coloured societal responses to sexual abuse of children.

In Dominica, the focus groups all agreed that homosexual abuse of children was generally kept secret. The groups acknowledged that the secrecy surrounding this matter resulted in under-reporting and boys suffering in silence.

The sexual abuse of boys by older men was identified by focus groups in Barbados as the major type of abuse. For those participants, changing societal values were seen as contributing to this type of activity. Where it was once seen as 'taboo', and kept 'closeted', young boys were becoming more 'open' in pursuit of homosexual liaisons. They were viewed as willing partners, leaving home with the specific intention to engage in this activity.

## Perception, Attitudes, And Opinionsabout How Perpetrators Can Be Helped

Most respondents (69.4 percent) believed that people who sexually abuse children can be helped to change, although 12.2 percent did not agree and 14.2 percent were not sure.

More than half of the respondents (55.6 percent) did not think it was a good idea for such treatment to be provided while the abusers remained at home within their communities. However, a significant number of respondents (20.7 percent8) thought that home-based treatment was possible, while 16.3 percent were not sure.

Whether the perpetrator of abuse is male or female did not significantly change the response to this question. There were no significant differences between male and female respondents in respect of this issue.

While some respondents believed that perpetrators should be subject to severe punishments, these views were in the minority. The main concern was that prosecution and law enforcement are ineffective, so that most perpetrators of abuse are not apprehended. In cases where they are, there are many impediments to successful prosecution that met society's needs to show disapproval. Furthermore in actualitythe existing punitive measures were often counter-productive as they did not think that law enforcement officers were

genuinely prepared to send a man to prison for 20 or 30 years for behaviour that was widespread and implicitly sanctioned. In any case convictions are rare.

Many people believe that abusers should be given treatment and that rehabilitation is possible in some instances although the view was expressed that there are some abusers who cannot be treated. Some respondents thought that heavy jail sentences for sexual offences against children met society's needs to show disapproval but that in actuality were often counter-productive as they did not think that law enforcement officers were genuinely prepared to send a man to prison for 20 or 30 years for behaviour that was widespread and implicitly sanctioned

*Figure 11*

# Taking Action Against Child Sexual Abuse

The exploration of the nature of child sexual abuse in the Eastern Caribbean led to examination of the challenges involved in preventing such abuse, including the deficiencies of reporting and the needs for protection of potential victims and rehabilitation of those affected by the abuse.

> "…there is a strong cultural taboo against talking about sex openly. It also may be the reason why individuals are unaware about the signs and symptoms of child sexual abuse".
> *Focus Group Participant - Montserrat*

## Challenges in addressing Child Sexual abuse

### Children Are Afraid Of The Consequences Of Reporting.

The difficulty of addressing child sexual abuse was analysed in terms of an interlocking system of factors that combine to sustain patterns of child sexual abuse. This was given a schematic representation as is the case in Figure 11.

One of the main reasons sexual abuse continues to be a significant element in the lives of children is that it is so rarely reported. Most respondents (82.3 percent) believed that children do not tell about sexual abuse because they are afraid of the consequences. These might include being treated as a liar, being blamed for what happened, or, if they are believed, being responsible for breaking up the family unit. A small but significant percentage – 9.2 percent - thought that children did not tell because they did not mind what had happened to them.

> "Women feel helpless because they have to depend on their partners for support…they are afraid that if they speak out about child [sexual] abuse within their homes this support will be taken away".
> *Focus Group Participant – St. Kitts and Nevis*

### Familes Reluctant To Report

All focus groups cited financial concerns, shame and fear as major influences which contribute to not reporting child sexual abuse. In instances of financial motivation, the abuser was often identified as the main breadwinner and the loss of income was a determining factor in allowing the abuse to continue. Also, the victim might be unwilling to contribute to the break up of the family by exposing the abuser. In this vein, the victim might be willing to sacrifice himself or herself to keep the family intact.

### Persons In The Community Are Also Reluctant To Report

Among participants in most of the Barbados focus groups, there was a general reluctance to report

instances of child sexual abuse. A number of reasons were advanced for this. People were worried about being characterised as being 'nosey' or 'interfering'. It was thought that families and perceived 'victims' might deny the abuse and, instead, 'turn against' the 'Good Samaritan'. They also mentioned the protracted judicial process and lack of confidence in the system as disincentives to reporting abuse.

## Confidentiality Concerns In Small Communities

Focus groups in Grenada stressed the need for confidentiality in reporting suspicions of child sexual abuse. Because many came from small communities, there was concern that someone reporting abuse could be identified by others in the community and suffer as a consequence. The sense was that dealing with child sexual abuse should be left to the authorities. Focus groups in Montserrat also thought concerns about confidentiality kept people from reporting sexual abuse of children. With no history of people being punished, while shame was brought to the victim's family, people saw only disadvantages to reporting abuse.

## Breaking The Silence

Respondents were overwhelmingly in support of the idea that children should be helped to speak out if an adult has taken sexual advantage of them. Most respondents also thought it would help

> **"What is most missing in Montserrat is talking about and the reporting of sexual abuse and even other forms of child abuse".**
> *Practitioner - Montserrat*

if people generally talked more openly about the problem of children being targeted for unlawful sex. While the police have often been criticised for their responses to child sexual abuse, the responses to the survey suggest that most people still think they have an important role to play.

## Some Persons Prefer To Deal With Abuse Themselves Rather Than Going To The Police

The majority of respondents (67.4 percent) said that if an adult in their family were sexually abusing a child within the family, they would always report it to the police. However, when asked a related question, a significant number of people (22.4 percent) said they would try to sort out such a problem without informing the police. Men were twice as likely as women respondents to state that they would sort it out without going to the police. Almost half of respondents (48 percent) did not think that police officers generally know how to deal with unlawful sex between adults and children.

These findings show a general lack of confidence in the ability of the police to deal effectively with child sexual abuse, although there is a strong sense that the respondents would prefer the authorities to take a significant role in protection of children from sexual abuse.

> **"There needs to be some level of confidentiality in it. You are 12 years old and your step-daddy or daddy is having sex with you in your house. You report it to a teacher and the teacher tells the principal. Next thing, it's all over the country and people are whispering about you".**
> *Focus Group Participant - Grenada*

## Mothers Mat Not Know How To Deal With Abuse

Some participants recognised that many mothers in these circumstances will have been victims themselves and perhaps do not know how to end the cycle of abuse.

They also noted that single and unemployed young mothers faced many challenges in providing adequate emotional and financial support to their children. Sexual abuse was also thought to be more prevalent in circumstances where women were found to have children from a number of different males for financial support which led to a 'parade of men into the house'.

Such is the influence of gender socialization, however, that men are readily forgiven for being poor fathers, but there is little tolerance (even from other women) of women who are considered poor mothers. The study suggests a combination of social factors that contribute to the complicit behaviour of some women in the abuse of children:

v  Poverty, which compels single mothers who are unable to sufficiently provide for their family, and economically dependent on men, to ignore abuse within the home in order ensure the family's economic survival.

v  The commodification of sex within society more widely.

v  Patriarchal values typified by men's sense of entitlement to sexually abuse the children of their partners because they were the breadwinners.

v  Cyclical abuse, by which many mothers in these circumstances will have been victims themselves and perhaps do not know how to end the cycle of abuse.

v  Predatory behaviour of some men who target and exploit vulnerable families.

## Child Protection Department Need Strengthing

In the countries of the Eastern Caribbean, responsibility for dealing with child sexual abuse is usually dispersed among several government

> **"One of the main challenges is the lack of co-ordinated response, the response is fragmented".**
> *Practioner - Grenada*

ministries, departments and agencies. In Anguilla, for instance, responsibility within the Ministry of Health and Social Development is given to: the Department of Social Development (DSD – Family and Social Services Section); the Child Protection Steering Committee; the Probation Department; the Department of Youth and Culture; the National HIV and AIDS Programme Office; the Health Promotion Unit; and, within the Department of Education, to Schools and School Health Nurses.

## Inadequate Staffing At Child Rotection Departments

Practitioners in Barbados pointed out that the effectiveness of the current system was hampered by a lack of adequate personnel. There was consensus that the current staffing situation of Government agencies with responsibility for children had affected the quality of the provision of services. The interviewees also generally felt that child protection laws were inadequate and that there was great scope for improvement.

For practitioners in Dominica, the key challenge was a lack of resources and training in relevant

skills in the key departments (SWD and the police) responsible for child protection.

## Very Few Reporting Protocols

One area of concern was the lack of reporting protocols. Practitioners argued for mandatory reporting, in-camera hearings to protect confidentiality and greater consistency in related legislation. One suggestion was that the police should be given the ability to pursue cases of statutory rape or sexual abuse regardless of what the parties may do to prevent it. Although in Dominica, the Social Work Division had formalised and documented protocols for reporting and case management, the practitioners interviewed did not feel that they had access to an adequate protocol for reporting and case management.

Practitioners in Anguilla were concerned that, in the absence of established procedures, there was uncertainty whether a formal investigation was an appropriate response to hearsay. Some respondents reported legal considerations that prevented their questioning of the child disclosing abuse as this could jeopardise the court case. However, professionals in the health field thought it was important to talk to the child regardless of possible legal repercussions.

## Lack of Other Resources To Deal With Child Sexual Abuse

Lack of resources to deal with children and families affected by child sexual abuse was a common theme throughout the regions. A practitioner in Montserrat noted that "One of the major challenges when dealing with cases of child sexual abuse is that there is currently no place to put the child victim when the situation determines that the child must be removed from the household," In Anguilla, it was thought that over-dependence on the foster care system as a means of responding to cases of

abuse was a problem since the foster care system is under-resourced and is itself a sphere in which abuse takes place.

## Lack of Public Awareness Of Child Sexual Abuse

Several focus groups and practitioner interviewees in different countries expressed concern that there could be no real reduction in child sexual abuse unless children, parents and community members were made aware of the problem and how to deal with it. Focus groups participants in Anguilla high-lighted their perception that education to prevent child sexual abuse was, if anything, more impor-tant than reporting. The Barbados focus groups proposed that the Government adopt campaigns similar to those for HIV/AIDS prevention to educate the public.

## Ineffective Implementation Of Laws

Policy makers generally thought that their countries had good laws and policies but ineffective implementation; however, there was also lack of clarity regarding the laws applicable to child protection. Limitations of the legislation were seen reflected in the fact that the laws represent a criminal justice-led child protection system rather than a holistic child-centred approach to child protection of which criminal justice is only one part.

A need for more child-centred judicial process was clearly identified.

Many policy makers thought the laws needed revising, especially where it concerned the legal requirement for permission from parents of victims in order for the responsible authorities to take cases to court. As laws now stand, if the mother/ legal guardian of the minor victim does not agree to the prosecution of the case, there is little the authorities can do.

> **"If I find evidence that supports child abuse or child sex abuse, often the parents do not want to go any further with it and there is nothing I can do to insist on taking the process".**
> *Practitioner - Anguilla*

Among practitioners, there was a strong sense that, although there were laws and policies in place, their implementation was so weak that it rendered the systemic responses to child sexual abuse almost useless. Although they saw some room for improvement in substantive law, they acknowledged that the greater problem was with the policies and procedures so critical to the effective implementation of those laws. Practitioners and senior officials saw a fragmented, ad hoc approach taken to child protection.

## Effecting Change

Participants from across the Eastern Caribbean saw the need and the potential for broad-based social support systems to educate the public about the damage caused by child sexual abuse, and the ways the community as a whole can work together to protect children, prevent child sexual abuse and create the conditions in which damage caused by the abuse can be healed.

### Schools

The full range of social and community institutions were seen as having significant roles to play. One of the most important of these is the education system. Schools are significant parts of the community. Although some schools have themselves been implicated in child sexual

abuse, participants almost unanimously agreed that schools are also able to play a key role in identifying children who are either at risk of abuse or being abused, as well as providing the education children need to protect themselves from sexual abuse.

> **…schools are also able to play a key role in identifying children who are either at risk of abuse or being abused…**

During the stakeholder consultations the view was expressed that many Caribbean parents are generally not in favour of sex education being provided within the school setting, based on the perception, unsupported though it is by any research evidence, that sexual health education actually encourages children to have sex. However, respondents to the questionnaire where

*Figure 12*



Schools should take a role in educating children about healthy sexual behaviour

2%   1%   5%

92%

- Agree
- Disagree
- Not Sure
- Missing

overwhelmingly in favour of the view that schools should take a role in educating children about healthy sexual behaviour.

Barbados focus groups also called for an improved role for schools in supporting students exposed to sexual abuse.

## Religious Organisations

Religion was also seen as an important aspect of life to the majority of the respondents. Stakeholder consultations revealed concerns that religious leaders are often complicit in keeping child abuse secret, with an emphasis being on protecting reputations and preserving families at the cost of protecting children. Concerns were also expressed that some religious leaders use their positions of trust and authority to abuse children themselves.

The majority of respondents (84.4 percent) thought that religious leaders should do more to stop the sexual abuse of children. Focus groups in Barbados saw the churches from two perspectives, seeing both the role that could be played in preventing child sexual abuse and healing those affected by it, while some also acknowledged the culpability of churches in covering up cases of abuse.

## Media Have A Central Role To Play

Stakeholder consultations revealed that the media play a central role in determining how sexual behaviour is portrayed within Caribbean societies. The media both reflect and contribute to the formation of values and attitudes held by the general public. A significant majority of respondents – 72.5 percent - agreed with the statement that 'Media campaigns against abuse would help to stop adults taking sexual advantage of children'.

*Based on the foregoing findings the researchers made the following recommendations:*

# Recommendations

## Regional

**Develop a Regional (and country-level) Strategic Plan for the Building of Abuse-free Childhoods.**

Strategies to address child sexual abuse must be based on a whole of society approach. This would dovetail with the current work on child abuse and gender-based violence being led by CARICOM and international development partners (UNIFEM, UNICEF, DfID, CIDA) and connect with country-specific National Plans of Action for Children and Child Protection Action Plans. Such an approach should integrate prevention, support, treatment, and the punishment of abusers as simultaneous interventions that are underpinned by robust policies and leg¬islation.

**A Regional Hub of Expertise for the Building of Abuse-Free Childhood should be established.**

This activity should be led by CARICOM in collaboration with international development partners. A model for such an agency is provided by the Multi-Agency Resource Service (MARS) based at the University of Stirling, in Scotland.

**Caribbean governments, under the leadership of CARICOM, should take decisive and prompt action to prevent child sexual abuse through technology.**

The Internet is an increasingly significant element in child sexual abuse and child pornography, and governments need to take urgent measures to protect children from these increased risks. These measures should deal not only with the many ways that children can be abused through the Internet (including child pornography and luring) but also with the innovative forms of abuse that make use of cell phones.

## Country Level Policies and Programmes

**Develop an approach to child protection that is cost-effective, sustainable and primarily focused on the prevention of abuse, the support of families and the development of protective and responsible parenting.**

The focus should be shifted from one that is preoccupied with procedures, policies and protocols to a broad preventative, empowerment-based systemic approach. The emphasis should be on tackling the factors that contribute to and sustain child abuse. Children are not only protected by procedures or protocols which often have disproportionate resources devoted to discussing, reviewing, monitoring, revising and reflecting on the failures of their implementation. Examples of means to address the problem of child sexual abuse include a social mobilisation campaign from Cambodia.

**All stakeholders should be engaged in the process of planning and implementing a more comprehensive approach to protecting children from sexual abuse.**

A fully integrated strategic plan will involve the

> **"It is always good to get the opinions of those who you are developing policy for".**
> *Focus Group Participant - Montserrat*

active participation of professionals (police, social workers, health professionals), children and young people, parents, men, women , politicians, the judiciary, NGOs, faith based organisations, media, sports leaders, community leaders, academics and the corporate sector.

### Child sexual abuse, at the policy level, should be reframed as a public health issue.

While it is important to maintain recognition of abuse as a broader issue, affecting children's rights and social relations, it also has serious implications for health. Child sexual abuse is implicated in teenage pregnancy, abortions (and related complications), mental illness, drug and alcohol abuse, prevalence of sexually transmitted infections and HIV transmission. The Regional Strategy on HIV-AIDS can provide a template for the development of the strategy on child sexual abuse.

### Governments should adopt the child/family friendly approach to budgeting, social planning and economic development that has been promoted by UNICEF and Action for Children.

This approach advocates making the support of the family and the wellbeing of children the responsibility of every Ministry; it involves identifying multi-sectoral targets and requires the ring-fencing of budgets to achieve progress. In relation to child sexual abuse, this approach would result in making restoring childhoods everyone's business. It recognises that while the most profound effects of child sexual abuse are felt by the victim, there are also huge financial costs for governments. It makes sound economic sense to protect and support children and families.

Caribbean governments simply cannot afford not to invest in child protection.

### As part of disaster preparation, governments should adopt and implement policy and programme guidelines to protect children from sexual abuse and sexual violence in disaster and emergency situations

This should cover both measures taken before disaster strikes (mitigation measures) through the immediate response (relief efforts) to long-term interventions (recovery). The manual on this subject produced by ECPAT would provide a good basis for this endeavour.

### Governments should develop and implement a pro-active, young person-centred campaign to empower girls to resist transactional sexual abuse

Government departments with responsibility for public education, in collaboration with media organisations, NGOs and international development partners, should take the lead in this. A model for this approach is provided by a campaign in Costa Rica that features peer role models, featuring teenage girls in advertisements and portraying teenagers' points of view on the issue.

### Governments should undertake information campaigns about teenage pregnancy using new media

Caribbean governments should use powerful and hard-hitting public education campaigns, with videos posted on YouTube and other social media to get the attention of young people. The study authors cited an example of such a campaign in the UK. In the Caribbean, it would deal with the risks of

teen pregnancy, and also the impact of abortion on teenage girls.

## In every country, child-sensitive justice systems should be established to deal with child sexual abuse crimes.

There is a need to review the whole system of investigation and prosecution of child sexual abuse cases to bring these processes in line with the best international standards. Many of the law enforcement practices described during the course of the study can themselves constitute an abuse of children. Children who disclose abuse are often taken by the police officer to confront the abuser and also asked to show where the abuse took place as part of the investigation. The fear and distress this creates for the child is such that it may be as damaging as the abuse that is being investigated. Children are then required to give evidence in courts set up for adults. They are cross-examined in front of their abuser, who may still frighten them.

## Mechanisms should be put in place to make it easier for children to report instances of sexual abuse, without fear of reprisal or greater harm, in ways that fully respect their rights and the duty of society to protect them, and to provide for more effective implementation of existing laws dealing with sexual abuse of children.

Most abuse is unreported and the laws, however well-intentioned they might be, cannot therefore take effect. The burden of proof required for prosecution should begin with believing the child, following the children's rights approach. In many countries of the region, where legal action must be initiated by the parent, the state should take a leading role in initiating legal processes. Investigation should be tailored to the needs and

capacities of the children, to make them more comfortable in reporting abuse.

## Governments should take bold action in relation to child protection law reform.

The obstacles to the implementation of the OECS Family Law Reform Project should be identified and removed, and the proposed laws should be adopted across the region. This will ensure that there is regional harmonisation of legislation, an important step given trade liberalisation, the inter-country movement of workers and regional migration. It is also an important step for regional cooperation on child trafficking.

## Fairer sentencing that is responsive to the different types of child sexual abuse should be introduced, along with more comprehensive levels of culpability. Added to this should be the introduction of restorative justice for some cases of child abuse.

The threat of long prison sentences for child abuse was seen to be more of a deterrent to the reporting of abuse than it is for the abuse itself. Penalties that are appropriate to the circumstances are needed. A more nuanced approach to sentencing would make it easier for families to accept the need to identify and put an end to risks of abuse, help police lay charges against people who may be their neighbours, and allow the courts to take an approach for healing rather than merely punishment. There is potential healing for communities through the introduction of restorative justice approaches. The Family Group Conference model in the child protection legislation of New Zealand places the responsibility for protecting children on the family; it is in an empowerment, strengths-based approach that entails confronting families with the reality of abuse

and facilitating a process whereby the family produces a child protection plan and is supported in its implementation. It is also necessary to introduce penalties for those who assist or protect perpetrators or pervert the course of justice.

### Governments should consider adopting a policy of mandatory reporting of child sexual abuse.

Mandatory reporting, supported by a public education campaign, would provide a clearer indication of the extent of child sexual abuse and would promote earlier and more effective interventions to protect children and their families. This would probably lead to a substantial increase in reports of abuse. The introduction of mandatory reporting, therefore, be fully undertaken when the systems and infrastructure needed to deal with an increase in reports are in place. Resources will be needed to carry out initial assessment of risk, to investigate and provide therapeutic services, and to provide for surveillance and monitoring of alleged perpetrators.

## Community Action

### Create systems that will prevent child sexual abuse by raising awareness and encouraging early recognition and responses to the problem.

A programme called "Stop It Now!", from the UK, offers a model for an approach that is based on the belief that sexual abuse is preventable. It is especially helpful for people who might become

> **"Education, education, education for children, men and women".**
> Focus Group Participant - Grenada

abusers, struggling with sexual thoughts and behaviours toward children, and those who want to stop but do not know how. Confidential help and support is provided to abusers and potential abusers in a non-punitive approach to prevention and risk reduction.

### School-based counselling services should be put in place to help children and parents, while also providing school staff members the opportunity to train as counsellors

Children are empowered to resolve their emotional and behavioural difficulties, while parents who are equipped to tackle their own issues are able to form more positive relationships with their children. Evaluation of this process has shown that children are happier and have better prospects. Not only does the method enable effective support of children who have been abused, it also encourages the development of protective, responsible parenting. It incorporates teachers within the whole of society approach to child protection and it contributes to behavioural change. The model cited in the study is the 'Place2Be', an innovative award-winning NGO in the UK that works inside schools to improve the emotional wellbeing of children, their families and the whole school community.

### Tourism businesses in the Caribbean should adopt the Code of Conduct for the Protection of Children from Sexual Exploitation in Travel and Tourism

The Code of Conduct is an industry driven responsible tourism initiative in collaboration with ECPAT International, funded by UNICEF and supported by the UNWTO. Since the introduction of the Code of Conduct, in 2005, it has now been adopted by the tourist industry in over 63 countries. The Code requires them, among other things, to establish an ethical policy regarding
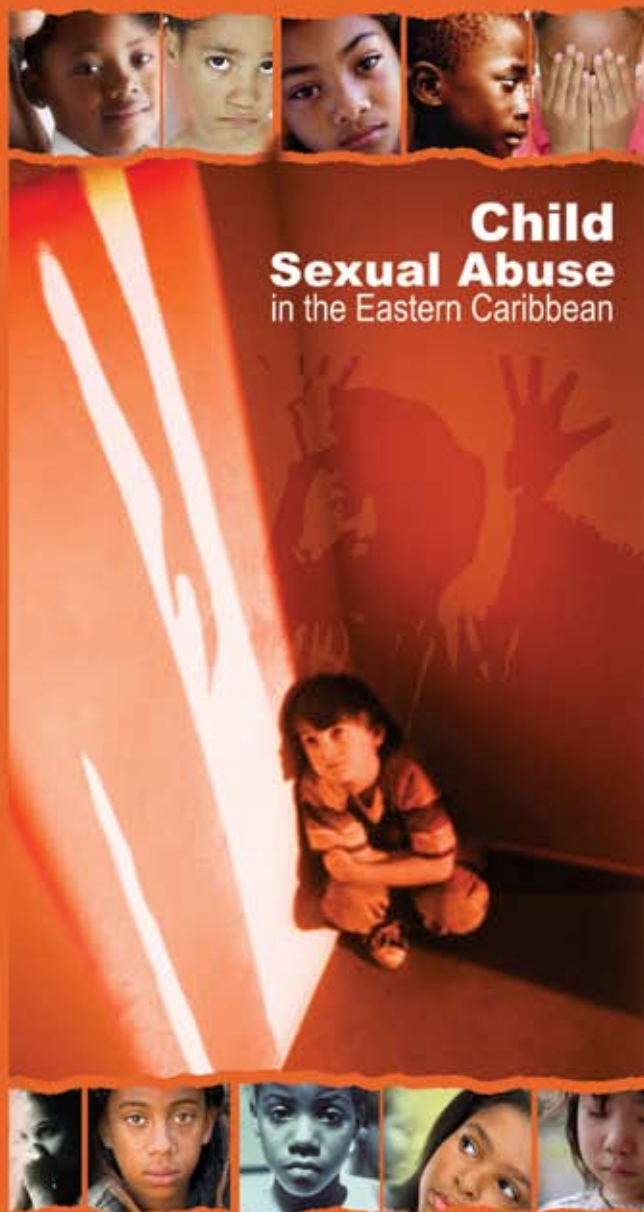
commercial sexual exploitation of children, to provide information to travellers by means of catalogues, brochures, in-flight films, etc., and to provide information to local "key persons" at the destinations. In view of comments from the focus groups, this approach should be extended to taxi drivers and mini-bus drivers as part of a campaign for child-friendly transportation at the local level.

### Engage cultural groups, artists and the media in promoting child protection

Local festivals such as carnivals, best village competitions, talent shows, beauty competitions and the work of local artists to convey messages about the risks posed by child sexual abuse and ways to prevent it.

Child
**Sexual Abuse**
in the Eastern Caribbean