

Orphaned boys as vulnerable to abuse as girls

April 24 2015

Orphaned children in low- and middle-income countries face a high risk of trauma, with physical and sexual abuse being by far the most prevalent traumatic events.

New research shows that orphaned [boys](#) in these settings are just as likely to experience abuse as girls. As a result, the study authors suggest targeting more support services and prevention programs toward protecting vulnerable boys.

Researchers from Duke University and the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill found that physical and [sexual abuse](#) affects 12 percent of girls and 14 percent of boys in institution-based care, and 19 percent of girls and 20 percent of boys in family-based care annually.

By age 13, approximately half of orphans experience abuse, regardless of gender or setting.

Despite the similarities in abuse instances across gender, international funding mechanisms—such as the U.S. President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief and the United Nations task force on protection from sexual exploitation and abuse—often place a special emphasis on protecting girls while neglecting to address the need to protect orphaned boys from abuse.

"So much of our funding for children in adversity focuses on girls," said Kathryn Whetten, director of the Center for Health Policy and Inequalities Research at the Duke Global Health Institute.

"This study demonstrates the critical need to invest in [support services](#) for boys, too—not only for their own protection, but to help prevent them from becoming abusers themselves," said Whetten, who is also a professor in Duke's Sanford School of Public Policy. "And this, in turn, helps further protect [girls](#) in the long run."

Research has shown that experiencing [traumatic events](#) such as abuse often leads to a significant long-term burden, adversely affecting one's [health](#), quality of life and economic productivity in adulthood. These potential outcomes reinforce the need for programs to protect both orphaned [girls and boys](#) in these countries, who are particularly susceptible to abuse.

The research was conducted as part of the Positive Outcomes for Orphans longitudinal study in Cambodia, Ethiopia, India, Kenya and Tanzania led by Whetten.

The researchers examined self-reported prevalence and incidence of several potentially traumatic event types, including physical and sexual abuse, among 2,235 children. The study was supported by the National Institute of Child Health and Development Grant No. 5R01HD046345.

The research team also included faculty at the University of North Carolina Gillings School of Global Public Health, the Duke departments of psychiatry, pediatrics and medicine; and the Duke Center for Child and Family Health. The findings appear in the April edition of *Global Mental Health*.

More information: "Gender (In)Differences in Prevalence and Incidence of Traumatic Experiences Among Orphaned and Separated Children Living in Five Low- and Middle-Income Countries," Christine L. Gray, Brian Wells Pence, Jan Ostermann, Rachel Whetten, Karen O'Donnell, Nathan Thielmann, Kathryn Whetten. *Global Mental Health*,

April 2015. [DOI: 10.1017/gmh.2015.1](https://doi.org/10.1017/gmh.2015.1) . Download a PDF -
<http://journals.cambridge.org/GMH/apr15gray>

Provided by Duke University

Citation: Orphaned boys as vulnerable to abuse as girls (2015, April 24) retrieved 5 May 2024
from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2015-04-orphaned-boys-vulnerable-abuse-girls.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.