



Violent Crimes Against Adolescent Boys: Rethinking Crime and Protection Frameworks

Swarnima Gorani

Prof., PhD, full professor
Sharda School of Law, Sharda University
swarnima.gorani@sharda.ac.in



Abstract

Aim: This paper examines the underrecognised victimisation of adolescent boys, focusing on physical violence, homicide, sexual exploitation, bullying, and cyberviolence. It seeks to strengthen recognition of boys' vulnerabilities within gender-inclusive child protection and crime prevention.

Methodology: The analysis considers the forms, extent, and potential drivers of violence against adolescent boys, examining masculinity stereotypes, gaps in legal protection, institutional bias, and limitations in existing child protection practices.

Findings: The paper argues that gendered assumptions and institutional shortcomings can obscure boys' victimisation and weaken protective responses. It highlights the need to address their specific vulnerabilities within a balanced approach to protecting both boys and girls.

Value: The paper advocates a gender-sensitive, evidence-based approach to child protection and crime prevention, combining recognition of boys' needs with policies promoting positive masculinity and the safety of all children.

Keywords: Adolescent Boys, Violent Crimes, Child Protection, Gender Stereotypes

The manuscript was submitted in English. Received: 15 June 2026; Revised: 20 July 2026; Accepted: 26 August 2026.



Introduction

Adolescent boys are underrepresented in school-related violence initiatives yet are frequently victims of severe violence. Boys in the transition from the social and psychological vulnerabilities of childhood to the dangers of violence intensify as they grow older. As boys grow from childhood, they are exposed to an increased risk of different types of violence, including physical, gang, sexual and psychological abuse. Although adolescent boys make up a significant proportion of victims and perpetrators of violence around the world, the victims' and perpetrators' issues remain hidden in the dominant focus on girls' vulnerabilities in mainstream discourses on child protection (Bhushan, 2026).

These unseen invisibilities are due to the persistence of traditional stereotypes that see boys as naturally tough or aggressive or as a potential aggressor instead of as vulnerable people in need of protection. The consequences are profound unreported trauma, inadequate support services, easily going untreated in mental health and cycles of violence. This paradox of an increase in violent offending rates among youths and high rates of victimisation among boys is present in many societies including India, thus complicating child welfare agencies and law enforcement efforts.

Good responses break with binary gender policies to adopt a more empirical approach that does not marginalize boys-risk reduction but takes account of boys risks as a whole. The shared goal of this introduction is to provide a thorough analysis of the issue, its etiology and the compelling need to reconsider policies governing adolescent protection for the benefit of all adolescents. Violence against boys should not just be treated as an 'equity issue' but as vital to creating safer communities and to breaking intergenerational cycles of violence.

Defining Adolescent Boys and the Scope of Violent Crimes

WHO/UNICEF considers adolescent boys to be boys in their ages 10-19. This is a crucial developmental moment in which there are significant changes occurring in the body, emotions and social interactions, and emerging independence and susceptibility to outside stimuli. The violent acts against adolescent boys include a broad range of acts: physical violence (assault, killing, and gang violence), sexual violence (rape, molestation, and exploitation), psychological violence (bullying, emotional abuse, and cyberbullying) and new types of violence like drug-facilitated violence and radicalisation that take place online. It entails interpersonal and structural violence in both the home and in the digital space, school and community settings.

Adolescents are exposed to special risks, including peer pressure and the development of identity and the surrounding risk situations. Lethal violence, especially homicide, disproportionately impacts boys, creating it one of the biggest causes of mortality for young men (aged 15-29) worldwide. Crimes committed against boys in India and many developing countries include sex crimes (which are often unreported among boys as these crimes are stigmatized), criminals paid to commit crime, and street crimes (where boys are the victims of street violence).

Luoming the problem is the key to reaching effective policy making. It means to differentiate between perpetrator and victim boys as well as understand that many boys are both. There should be more than just the harm that is done, there needs to be a whole framework of how it affects the development of a child in the long term which may include trauma, substance abuse and misguided expectations of masculinity (Vernon, 2026). Such a wider perspective breaks with the mainstream models of child protection and urges interventions based on age and gender in order to ensure that the experiences of young people are taken into account.

Magnitude and Emerging Trends of Violence

Violence towards adolescent boys is alarming and systematically under-reported. Males aged 15-29 are underrepresented as victims of homicide at almost four times the rate of females in many parts of the world. According to the data of the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB), thousands of cases of crimes against children in India are reported every year, and boys are more prone to getting abducted, physically assaulted, and subjected to gang violence. Male students are likely to be sexualized victims, with research indicating that 1 in 8 boys will be the victim of some type of sexual abuse by the time they reach the age of 18 years.

Gang-related violence, exploitation by drugs and other unlawful products of the Internet, like online grooming, sextortion and inciting violence, have grown. The rise of social media, gaming and other trends has added new forms to psychological abuse and radicalisation. India, as well as other countries, has experienced an increase in the number of youths among the perpetrators of serious violent crime, which may be related to prior victimisation.

After the toll of the pandemic, the mental health crises, school dropouts, and community violence exposure are all rising among adolescent boys. Issues of economic inequality, urbanisation and climate change add to vulnerabilities. Such patterns of victimisation warrant immediate attention, as victimisation during adolescence often becomes a pattern of perpetration that can persist

later in life. In-depth, gender-disaggregated data collection is essential for addressing the shortcomings of basic statistics and creating interventions to prevent a specific risk.

Why Adolescent Boys Are Often Overlooked in Protection Discourse

Gender stereotyping and deeply rooted beliefs and norms often ignore or marginalise adolescent boys from the realm of child protection. Stories about girls tend to be about safeguarding them, protecting them, caring for them, while stories about boys are about them having the capacity to ‘handle themselves’.

Workings on girls’ issues (child marriage, child trafficking, sexual violence etc.) are mostly dominated in protection frameworks, policies and funding, and boys have been assumed to be primarily perpetrators. Some of the disadvantages of this binary approach are that it omits evidence that boys face significant victimisation, especially in relation to physical violence, homicide, bullying and sexual exploitation. The issue is further exacerbated by institutional bias in police, judiciary, and child welfare practices, with boys less likely to be identified as victims or to be offered child welfare services.

Boys’ aggression is sensationalised through the media and in talk, whereas their suffering is downplayed. Moreover, the lack of research and data disaggregation by gender and by age maintains invisibility. Consequences of this oversight are serious: untreated trauma is diagnosed; there is an increase in suicide rates; people become intoxicated; participants go down criminal roads.

There is a need to rethink protection, which involves recognising boys’ vulnerabilities, but not losing sight of the theme of protecting girls. True inclusion of children into child protection systems and the reduction of child protection risks can only occur when a gender transformative approach is promoted that deconstructs the harmful norms of masculinity and allows boys to access safe spaces, mental health care and positive role models (Cardenas, 2026).

Nature, Patterns and Typologies of Violent Crimes

Violent crime involving adolescent boys can take a variety of forms, and has been identified as having unique patterns (involving age, place, socio-economic status and cultural context) (van Rijswijk, 2026). Physical violence, which manifests in street fights, gang violence, mob lynching, and homicide, is the most often witnessed and deadly form of violence. Adolescent boys are the overwhelming majority of victims of homicide in the age group 10-19 years both globally and in India. This fact has been consistently reported in NCRB data in

India indicating that the murders of boys are commendably high, and grievous hurt is also high in comparison with girls of the same age group. The problem of gang violence has become an important issue in urban slums and semi-urban areas, which is associated with territorialism, drug peddling or petty crime networks. Often these acts of violence take place with the use of a gun, a rod, or a knife, and are very dangerous and often lethal.

There is also sexual violence inflicted upon adolescent boys that affects them and is extremely under-reported (Usman et al., 2026). It covers rape, sodomy, forced pornography, online sexual exploitation, and trafficking for sexual purposes. The social stigma attached to being a boy and to being lesbian or gay is profound in most cases of sexual abuse against boys and results in a high level of under-reporting. Boys are at increased risk of sexual violence at the hands of someone they know, such as a friend, family member, or institutionalised person (coach, teacher, religious leader). New patterns have emerged with the arrival of the digital, like with sextortion, boys are being blackmailed by showing them pictures with their faces morphed over, or recorded acts.

One of the most gruesome acts is of *Bacha Bazi*, which means using Adolescent boys to dress up like females and dance and entertain the grown-up men. The act is not limited to entertainment but to sexually assault them as well. They are sodomized and forced to act as sex slaves. There is no reporting as such because it is done in countries like Afghanistan, Pakistan, etc where it is common and conducted behind closed walls. In a few instances, American soldiers posted in Afghanistan said in their interviews that they witnessed young boys chained to the beds of warlords and commanders of the country as sex slaves.

Bullying and cyberbullying are emerging typologies. Bullying at school and in the neighbourhood sometimes includes physical ragging, extortion, and psychological humiliation, while bullying via social media can result in mental trauma, self-harm, and suicide. The incidence of violence in relation to drugs has also picked up, with young boys becoming the victims of drug-fueled violence and the target of the low-end entities in the narcotics network. There is another emerging pattern of boys being pushed into criminal activity under the label of forced criminality, which is trying to convince the boys that they were forced to steal, rob or engage in begging.

There are clear trends in these offences, and these offences seem to be concentrated in certain settings, such as urban and transitional peri-urban zones, and are particularly vulnerable at dusk and nighttime, with a strong association to school drop-outs, family dysfunction and peer influence on school attendance. Poly-victimisation, defined as exposure to multiple types of violence, is experienced by many boys. Additional cases of victimisation can be explained

by intersectionality with caste, class, religion, and migration status, with boys of marginalised groups being at greater risk of victimisation. The ability to understand these typologies is crucial in order to shift from general to specific, evidence-based prevention and response intervention strategies to the contexts where adolescent boys may be involved in a violent situation (Estorcien & Taliaferro, 2026).

Socio-Cultural and Psychological Factors Contributing to Victimisation

Socio-cultural and psychological factors are the most significant factors precipitating adolescent boys' victimisation. At the heart of their vulnerability are deeply entrenched gender norms and toxic expectations of men. The culture conditions boys in a way that they are taught 'boys don't cry,' and they are pressured to tough it out and act aggressively rather than cry. They may be told not to report abuse or get help, and not to be afraid; these are cultural scripts that can lead to ignoring abuse, putting off intervening, and suppressed trauma. In many instances, boys who do not conform to the traditional norms of masculinity (for example, sensitive boys or those who are not athletic or dominant) can be a cause of bullying and violence.

A major contributing factor is the family environment. Boys' vulnerability to external victimisation is strongly related to exposure to domestic violence, parental inebriation and alcoholism, neglect, and authoritarianism within the family (He et al., 2026). Being raised in a dysfunctional family (characterised by domestic violence, parental inebriation and alcoholism, lack of attention or lack of authority) significantly raises boys' risk of being victimised externally. For many in India, sons ought to be earning a living or helping the family to earn a living rather than starting in early childhood, the more dangerous environment of the street or more exploitative activity at work. Among boys, peer pressure and a boy's wish to be backed by the rest of the peer group can take him into dangerous situations or cause him to affiliate with a gang or engage in risky behaviour that increases his vulnerability to violence.

Vulnerabilities also compound risks, in socio-economic terms. Boys living in poverty, without jobs, forced to live in slums, out of school or without access to quality education are vulnerable targets for recruitment into criminal networks or into drug trafficking or sexual exploitation schemes. Of systems of protection from families and communities, and in the absence of community oversight, the risks of migrant and street-connected boys are extremely high.

As the personality develops, the mind of an adolescent is a time of testing their sense of identity, impulsiveness, and an elevated level of reactivity. This renders boys especially susceptible to manipulation, to radicalisation by social media, and to being distanced engaged with violent subcultures. For victimised boys, childhood trauma, low self-esteem and poor emotional regulation can become a vicious cycle, leading to further victimisation or becoming perpetrators as a result of their aggressive behaviour.

With the media, game culture and online platforms, these harmful masculinity ideals promote violence, dominance and risk-taking ideas. Watchers become desensitised and normalise aggression by exposure to violent memes and communities online. Caste-based discrimination, communal tensions and/or ethnic conflicts in India further compound the structural violence that disproportionately impacts adolescent boys belonging to certain caste or minority groups.

These factors combine to a ‘perfect storm’ of vulnerability. Boys are trapped between the demands for strength imposed on them by society and their developmental needs for protection and emotional support. Boys are in the middle, socially expected to be strong but developmentally needing protection and emotional support (DeKeseredy, 2026). Gender transformative approaches to address harmful norms, increase family resilience, enhance school climate and create interventions that support accessible mental health services for boys, have the capacity to break this cycle. Intimate partner violence’s root causes, because they are socio-cultural and psychological, must be addressed first if any effective stemming is to be done.

Existing Legal and Policy Frameworks: Gaps and Limitations

The current legislation and policies addressing child protection in India are also lacking in scope in cases of violent crimes against adolescent boys. The foundation of the child protection framework is provided by the Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2015, which is the National Children’s Act and the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act, 2012. Both laws are, however, predominantly geared towards girls. The text of POC-SO is not gender-specific; intervention practices are disproportionately focused on ‘girl victims’. Because of the stigma surrounding sexual abuse of boys, the reporting, investigation and prosecution of these cases is often poor. Children’s cases are often not reported, poorly investigated, or the potential for secondary victimisation as a result of sexual abuse being a taboo subject for boys.

General provisions in IPC (presently Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita) for assault, hurt, and grievous hurt do not recognise the specific vulnerability of boys. Unlike schemes for the protection of the girl child, there is no specific national policy/scheme pertaining to the special protection needs of adolescent boys. The focus on the boy child, if at all, was minimal in the National Child Policy (2013) and there is no consideration of age-specific risks among adolescents.

Some of the key weaknesses were the lack of necessary gender specific data collection, lack of good documentation of man to man violence that is required for rehabilitation purposes and lack of adequate attention to cyber violence and gang victimization. Boys' cases may not be dealt with sensitively at institutional level, for example within the Child Welfare Committees (CWCs) or District Child Protection Units (DCPUs) which are often undertrained (Zharima et al., 2026). There is also inadequate coordination between child protection and police and education departments. These gaps lead to systemic invisibility of boys as victims and an inadequate protection regime that is not broad-based or effective.

Institutional Responses and Systemic Failures

India's institutional responses to violent victimization of adolescent boys expose deep-rooted institutional flaws. Boys' complaints, particularly those of sexual violence or bullying, are seldom taken seriously or treated as a serious issue at police stations because of longstanding gender biases. Parents and families believe that boys can 'handle themselves', which results in a backlog in filing the FIRs and inadequate investigation of cases. However, awareness and stigma means that childline and other helplines do not receive a comparable number of calls on boys' issues.

Schools often do not successfully tackle issues of bullying and peer violence. There is often a lack of training in addressing gender related issues for child protection among school management committees and teachers which affects intervention. The Child Welfare Committees and Juvenile Justice Boards are overwhelmed, under-resourced, and are not necessarily staffed by counselors or psychologists who have the proper traumas-informed skills to properly serve boys.

Likewise, in the health care system, there are similar areas of weakness. The majority of One Stop Centres (OSCs) and trauma care centres cater more to the victims who are females (Proffit, 2026). Whilst there are higher rates of depression, anxiety, drug and alcohol use and suicidal ideation among victimised boys, they almost do not receive mental health support from the public sector.

The issue is compounded by media coverage of boys that sensationalizes their role as perpetrators or fails to even depict the boys as victims. These institutional shortcomings generate a vicious circle of under-reporting, impunity and re-victimisation. Inter-agency coordination is still hampered, and monitoring and accountability systems therein are still weak. This calls for a holistic approach to training, targeted resources and institutional cultural changes that insert adolescent boys as a vulnerable group under need of targeted protection and care.

International Standards and Comparative Perspectives

International norms are helpful indicators for how to deal with violent acts against adolescent boys. The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) requires to protect all children, regardless of their gender. WHO's INSPIRE framework and the UN's Global Study on Violence against Children underscore the importance of gender responsive approach with boys included. Yet, across the board, girls continue to be prioritized and there is a policy gap in most global programs.

Other countries have found more harmonious solutions, such as Australia, Canada and the UK. Boys to Men programs in Australia and the UK This is Abuse campaign specifically focus on harmful masculinity and child/young person victimization. Some countries in Latin America have successfully incorporated issues related to boys into their country's violence prevention policies, especially in relation to gangs. Significant strides have been made in South Africa with smokingly interventions around male sexual violence.

The examples in this comparative perspective demonstrate that effective models include expanded focus on preventing problems within the community, school initiatives focused on toxic masculinity, and targeted prevention services for male victims. They also advocate for early prevention action in adolescence and engagement of males and boys in the prevention process.

These international experiences highlight the relevance of gender transformative programming, improved data systems, gender-specific boys helplines and mental health integration for India. India also needs to learn from what works elsewhere, but needs to make adaptations suitable to the country's cultural and socio-economic contexts. Implementation of a Rights-based approach with a balance to the UNCRC, and making use of local context, is fundamental to creating more effective protection frameworks. (297 words)

Conclusion: Rethinking Protection Frameworks: Recommendations and Way Forward

In India, adolescent boys continue to be a significant gap in the country's child protection mechanism and are highly susceptible to victimization. While having to focus on girls, this needs to evolve into a 'gender-inclusive approach' which seeks to address boys' specific vulnerabilities without at the same time loss of focus on girls. Key recommendations include:

- Shaping a comprehensive National Policy on Safety and Protection of Adolescent Boys.
- Ensuring that gender disaggregate data are collected and analysed for all crimes committed against children.
- Incorporating targeted strengthening of boys' victimisation in police, judicial and child protection trainings.
- Providing separate boys cubicles in police station and One Stop Centres, staffed with male counselors.
- Embedding gender transformative education in school's curriculum to counteract toxic masculinity and healthy emotional expression.
- Improving mental health support systems and community-based boy rehabilitation programs.
- Planning strong cyber safety strategies related to online violence towards boys.

There is only one way forward as a developmental, evidence-based and balanced perspective that considers adolescent boys operating as victims and agents of change. Protective systems should include moving toward healthy masculinity, emotional strength, and protective citizenship. In India, rethinking child protection with a more nuanced gender-centric perspective could enable the creation of safer spaces for all children. Not only is this change an issue of justice and equality, but it's necessary to stop cycles of violence and foster a more peaceful society. Now is the time to act adolescent boys need to be seen, protected and given opportunities to flourish.

References

- Bhushan, M. (2026). Algorithmic innocence and commercial predation redefining child exploitation: Era of AI-driven advertising under POCSO and digital rights framework. In L. R. Janjua, D. E. Kozma, & B. Singh (Eds.), *Imposter syndrome and AI: Navigating human identity in the age of intelligent machines* (pp. 63–84). IGI Global Scientific Publishing. <https://doi.org/10.4018/979-8-3373-6618-0.ch004>
- Cardenas, K. (2026). Reconsidering Life Without Parole: How SB 672 Reshapes Extreme Sentencing for Youth Offenders. *University of the Pacific Law Review*, 57(2), 221–233.
- DeKeseredy, W. S. (2026). Woman abuse in hockey-related contexts: The current state of social scientific knowledge. *Violence Against Women*, 32(8), 2008–2027. <https://doi.org/10.1177/10778012261425953>
- Estorcien, V., & Taliaferro, J. D. (2026). Governance Through Perception: Rethinking Evaluation in Police-Led Youth Programs. *Justice Evaluation Journal*, 1–19.
- He, S., Ma, C., Zhang, C., Jenkins, A. D., Abu-Salma, R., & Such, J. (2026). ‘Create an environment that protects women, rather than selling anxiety!’: Participatory threat modelling with Chinese young women living alone. In *Proceedings of the 2026 CHI Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems* (Article 1228, pp. 1–19). Association for Computing Machinery. <https://doi.org/10.1145/3772318.3790961>
- Proffit, C. (2026). Gang homicide and the unequal distribution of disadvantage: revisiting Krivo and Peterson’s threshold effects 25 years later. *American Journal of Criminal Justice*, 51(1), 167–193. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12103-025-09846-3>
- Usman, W., Taha, T., Iqbal, S., Batool, A., & Zappala, D. (2026, April). Understanding Gendered Experiences of Harassment Among Pakistani Young Adults Using Human-Centered Threat Modeling. In *Proceedings of the 2026 CHI Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems* (pp. 1–19). <https://doi.org/10.1145/3772318.3793807>
- van Rijswijk, H. (2026). The Bildungsroman of Consent and Its Impact on the Adjudication of Sexual Violence. In *Gender Stereotypes: Case Studies, Policies and Theoretical Approaches* (pp. 315–335). Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-63905-0_17
- Vernon, P. J. (2026). Rethinking transitional justice: The eliminationist news cycle in liberal democracies. *International Journal of Transitional Justice*, 20(1), 71–87. <https://doi.org/10.1093/ijtj/ijaf029>
- Zharima, C., Mboneli, E., Tsotetsi, L., Vermaak, S., Nkala-Dlamini, B., Violari, A., Kidman, R., Hammock, A., & Dietrich, J. (2026). ‘It is not my business’: Adolescent boys’ experiences and responses to community violence in Soweto, South Africa. *Journal of Child & Adolescent Trauma*, 19(3), 1597–1610. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s40653-026-00848-9>

How to cite this article

Gorani, S. (2026). Violent Crimes Against Adolescent Boys: Rethinking Crime and Protection Frameworks. *Belügyi Szemle*, 74(SI1), 165–176. <https://doi.org/10.38146/bsz-ajia.2026.v74.SI1.pp165-176>

Declarations

Conflict of interest

The author declared no conflicts of interest.

Funding

The author received no financial support for the research, authorship or publication of this article.

Ethics statement

The data are available from the author upon request.

Open access statement

This article is published with open access under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution–NonCommercial–NoDerivatives 4.0 International License (CC BY-NC-ND 4.0). The article may be freely shared and republished in any medium or format for non-commercial purposes, provided that it remains unchanged and that the original author(s), the source of publication and a link to the licence are appropriately acknowledged. Distribution of modified or adapted versions and commercial use are not permitted.

Corresponding author

The corresponding author is, Swarnima Gorani who can be contacted at swarnima.gorani@sharda.ac.in.