



FEDERACIÓN INTERNACIONAL
Fe y Alegría

Movimiento de Educación Popular Integral y Promoción Social

Hewlett-Packard Company

SECURE SPACE

SEXUAL ABUSE OF MINORS AND ITS COMMERCIAL EXPLOITATION

OUR STANCE AND COMMITMENT TO FACE THEM

Introduction

The space where our children and teenagers develop their lives must be an area that offers care, security and protection so as to help the process of full development of their personality. In towns and villages, this must be reflected at all times and circumstances: at home, at formal and non-formal schools, at community centers, in the streets of our shanty towns. Unfortunately, this ideal is not always brought to practice; violence often goes unnoticed and leaves serious traces in life.

Sexual abuse is a crime, not only a simple fault or some deviated conduct. This must be very clear. It's a kind of behavior penalized by law. And when underage people are implied in it, then it becomes a much more serious fact, because of the consequences of it for the rest of their lives. Facing this problem is something fundamental for us. We must work out and implement efficient strategies to prevent the continuation of different forms of violence and to conceive and execute mechanisms that make sure that, when such facts are uncovered, their victims are properly protected and receive adequate care. There's need for the sort of care which is full of respect, valorization and accompaniment of each person.

We're all aware that, when the under-eighteens get attention, protection and care, their growth is improved. In the same way, we know that their growth is threatened if they suffer abuse and their rights are not respected. In our times, the sexual abuse of the underage seems to be proliferating, or rather – perhaps - we now know better what in the past was concealed.

Acknowledging the huge magnitude of this phenomenon has led to the production of laws, policies and ambitious programs directed to the sexual abuse of minors and, in most cases, those initiatives focus their implementation at school.

On the base of the concepts of empowerment and assertion of one's personality, most of these programs aim at the strengthening of the underage person so that him/herself avoids getting mixed in situations of abuse or also the programs aim at increasing his/her capacity of resistance in face of a potential abuser.

In Fe y Alegría, as a Movement of Integral Popular Education and Social Promotion, we take it as our duty to prevent and to react in face of this reality because our mission consists in caring for and protecting the neediest underage. We take it as our responsibility, first to show and to denounce this social blight in order to face and attack it; then, to educate every member of our community in the care for oneself and for the others and in the spiritual, moral and physical integrity. This means to educate in the discernment of affections and emotions, in the weighing up of the prudent and necessary balance between closeness and distance, in the avoidance of both extremes: manipulation and indifference. Our stance comes out of the findings that the violence and sexual abuse of the underage in Latin America, the Caribbean and Africa are a fact that, day by day, is the cause of death of thousands of under-eighteens – boys and girls – and, in other thousands of them, the same fact leaves irreversible after-effects.

We're convinced that it's time to get into action, to pass from working out a discourse to attend and face those facts. Our countries can count on positive legislation that rules the whole process of complaint, inquiry, probation and sanctions. Moreover, they have at their disposal many experiences and a body of knowledge that are the fruit of research realized by national and international instances, public and private and from civil society. This means that the tools exist for our governments to do their duty and, thus, to make progress towards the eradication of the factors that lead to so high rates of sexual violence.

This document stands on the ethical pillar of popular education since it demands us to ask ourselves what is right or wrong in our work of educators. The foundation is juridical but, over it, there is a moral component that shows a right ways for decision and action taking in our schools and community centers. The policies we propose convey, first, an institutional standing in favor of childhood and youth and against every sort of violence, second, an ethical orientation for our every day action and, third, a juridical guide based on human rights. As popular educators, we are to become the main movers and shakers aiming at the true and full development of the human person.

Definitions

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), we can define abuse as “every form of ill treatment - id est, physical, emotional, sexual, carelessness, negligence, commercial exploitation or other - which is at the origin of some real or potential damage to the health of a child, its survival, its development or its dignity within the frame of a relationship of responsibility, trust or authority” ¹.

The same report defines sexual violence as the sexual behavior constrictive or not, imposed on a minor by a person over eighteen who may be physically superior, with more experience and resources and who uses his power or authority in an incorrect way.

Sexual violence refers to:

- a) sexual abuse carried out with physical contact or without it; a setting where the abuser seeks sexual gratification.
- b) the arbitrary use of strength in front of a defenseless victim, who, in many cases, is powerless because of his/her age and because of the force of the abusive event.

Both quoted definitions contain three main factors, namely, the first one: sexual abuse involves a boy or a girl under eighteen in any kind of sexual activity within the large spectrum that goes from exhibitionism to penetration. The second factor refers to the hierarchical differences that may exist between the abuser and his victim where the abuser is in a position of power and control over the abused victim. And the third factor, similar to the previous one, concerns what is known as the constrictive maneuvers on the part of the abuser and these can take the form of seduction, manipulation or threat. (*cf. López Sanchez, 1996*).

In the same line, the UNICEF report of the Regional Secretariat for the Study of Violence in Latin-America and the Caribbean (Costa Rica, March, 2005) gives as conclusion : “ the children’s ill treatment least denounced in most countries is sexual abuse. There is an increase in the number of complaints relative to family violence and

¹*Carlsson et al. Evaluación externa de la campaña contra el castigo físico y el abuso en América Central y México 1996-2000. SaveTheChildren Suecia.*

children's ill treatment. However, in the majority of such cases, the juridical frame protects the under eighteen who is victim of intra – family ill treatment, but not in the cases of ill treatment in other surroundings. In none of the countries of our study, there exists some kind of centralized information around the problems of children's ill treatment and family violence. There is only information which is partial, local or by sectors. As a result, the realization of the magnitude of the problem keeps being limited. And the main victims are children under the age of eleven. Only 10 % of these cases reach a tribunal and only 3 % end in a judicial sentence.”

Besides, the same report emphasizes the gender question. Girls are much more exposed than boys to suffer from sexual abuse. 75 % of those children are female whereas only 25 % are male. These figures are very similar to what happens elsewhere in the world. Other international studies show that more or less 10 % of children have been victims of sexual abuse. In our countries of Latin-America, the Caribbean and Africa, the percentage is a bit higher. Depending of each country, it varies from 12 to 19 %.

“Peru national statistics, for example the ones from ENDES 2000, mention studies where it's reckoned that, in 8 of every 10 cases of sexual abuse, the abuser is a member of the family sphere of the victim and that 6 of every 10 pregnancies in girls between 11 and 14 years of age are the result of incest or rape. School polls in Chili, Costa Rica, Panama and Peru, show that between 5 and 40 % of teenage girls have experienced at least one case of sexual abuse. Although in all those countries there are institutions that are capable to respond to the complaints of sexual aggression and abuse and to deal with their consequences, only in very few of them this question has become a relevant subject in the public agenda. Some studies estimate that for each complaint, four or five similar cases remain hidden. If this is the case, the amplitude of the problem overflows any institutional capacity to prevent or to take in hand such cases. In fact, it's an invitation to design new strategies with a larger participation of

the communities, a more powerful strengthening of social networks and a narrower base of institutional action”².

Rape and other kinds of sexual abuse against under – eighteens is spreading like an epidemic in the conflict zones of the African continent, according to the alert expressed by UNICEF. There, we can see that, unfortunately, sexual abuse and exploitation of minors are also very common. In the said regions of armed conflict, girls and women are a habitual target of a kind violence based on gender that includes rape, mutilation, prostitution, forced pregnancies and sexual slavery. Rape is systematically used as a war weapon and as means to terrorize the population and to destroy community links. Teenage girls are particularly at risk of being raped, kidnapped or of becoming victims of the white slave trade or of prostitution.

During humanitarian crises, girls and women may be in a hard economic situation. In their despair to economically survive themselves and their families, sometimes they are obliged to come to ‘agreements’ with the military, sometimes including the peace forces and even the staff of humanitarian organizations, in order to ascertain their security and survival. In some cases, the ones who are employed to protect the vulnerable sectors of the population abuse their power with impunity.

Likewise, the mass media inform daily about incidents where girls, especially orphans, are raped or sexually attacked. The aggressors – generally their own ‘new fathers’, uncles or neighbors – don’t get punished because the police and the judiciary consider that those crimes are the result of domestic problems. For those girls, however, their family – that should be a sanctuary of peace and protection – turns to be a den of impunity and a source of horrors.

According to statistics of UNICEF, African teenager girls who attend school are the most likely victims of physical violence and the aggressors are generally their own male teachers. In countries with a high rate of HIV, the sexual abuse of those girls not only has harmful effects on the victims. It can be a death sentence.

In Africa, another tragedy in reference to the present subject is the question of precocious marriage. Many children as young as 8 years and many teenage girls are

²UNICEF, *Informe Consolidado sobre la consulta de la Región América Latina y el Caribe sobre niños, niñas y adolescentes*, Secretaría Regional Estudio sobre Violencia, San José, Costa Rica, abril de 2005.

forced to get married, and in most cases, with adult men. Recent studies prove the permanent damage to which those children are subjected when they are obliged to marry at such an early age. It's their families that force them to contract marriage and this dramatic event implies that they haven't got control over getting pregnant or over the appropriate time for it or over other important aspects of their lives. Also, being married, they are bound to interrupt their studies and are victims of rape and domestic violence on the part of their husband³.

African girl children and teenagers, in many cases, are exposed to the violence of gender, including domestic abuse, and sexual violence from their husbands, stepfathers and other relatives of their husbands. As they must live with the husband's wide family they are attacked verbally or physically by his relatives.

The trade of sexual exploitation

By commercial sexual exploitation of children and teenagers, we mean "the use of people under the age of eighteen for paid sexual relations, for pornography involving children and adolescents and for sexual shows that include children and adolescents. This is the case when there is exchange of money or payment in another kind for a minor or a third party, including remunerated sexual or erotic activities with minors. It is not limited to coital activities. It includes every sexual relationship or erotic activity that imply physic-sexual closeness between the victim and the exploiter. Pornography that includes children and adolescents covers the activities of production, distribution, spreading by any means, offering, selling or possessing materials where a person under the age of eighteen or his/her image is used in explicit, real or simulated ways or the representation of genital organs at aims mainly sexual or erotic. Sexual shows consist in the use of minors with sexual or erotic aims in public or private shows or exhibitions"⁴.

³*Human RightsWatch, 2011.*

⁴*Declaración del Congreso Mundial contra la Explotación Sexual Comercial de los Niños, Estocolmo, Suecia, Junio, 1996.*

We can state that commercial sexual exploitation of children and adolescents is one of the most serious affronts to human rights since it is an assault on the integrity of the minor, on his/her dignity and it impairs such fundamental rights as the right to health, to education, to justice and to life. On top of being a criminal act, it's a despicable form of economic exploitation that can be compared to slavery. Children and adolescents victims of this type of exploitation undergo serious physical damage, as, for example, unwished pregnancies, or sexually transmitted illnesses, or injuries due to physical violence, or such psychological traumatizations as loss of self-esteem, mistrust, guilt feelings, sadness and also social damage : marginalization, humiliation and exclusion together with problems of verbal and written communication.

Research realized by the Program for the Eradication of Work for Children, an action of the International Organization of Work (IPEC-IOT), has shed light to the fact that the most vulnerable children for this matter of work of minors are the ones who have suffered from intra – family violence, or they have been submitted to previous sexual abuse, or they have lived through situations of extreme poverty, or they have been expelled from school. (*cf. UNICEF, Informe Consolidado sobre la consulta de la Región América Latina y el Caribe sobre niños, niñas y adolescentes, Secretaría Regional Estudio sobre Violencia, San José, Costa Rica, abril de 2005, págs. 68 y 69*).

The number of children and adolescents in this situation is almost impossible to know for certain, since we cannot reach reliable data to this respect, because of the underground quality of this kind of abuse. Some isolated instances that are detected find their way to the public opinion but they represent only the tip of a huge 'iceberg'. Sadly, we must infer there are millions of cases. Each year one million children are added to the market of commercial sexual exploitation in the world, which is not only illegal, it also generates economic benefits of millions. (*cf. UNICEF, Explotación sexual comercial de niñas, niños y adolescentes. Antecedentes y avances, 2001*). The ones directly responsible in this matter are the people who hold the commands of the exploitation, the ones who organize it within each country, the ones who trade in sexual tourism and the pimps who enrich themselves thanks to this sort of exploitation and who expand their action through international 'mafioso' networks, with closely covered links with the security, the judiciary and the political power.

Conclusion

We agree with the idea that it is important to present children and adolescents with as much information as possible so as to prevent this kind of abuse, but we are convinced that, given the facts, we must conclude this does not suffice to avoid the occurrence of such aberrations. Through information we deal with only part of the problem. We don't reach a full solution.

This is why, as Movement, we are to implement action at different levels that will help to lead our efforts of prevention towards the collaboration of different strata of our communities, mobilizing fundamentally the adults for the prevention of sexual abuse. As Fe y Alegría, we must commit ourselves to not leaving the eradication of such a serious problem in the hands of children and adolescents. It's our duty and we assume it fully.

Whenever we deal with this question, we have to keep in mind:

- a) that it is essential to integrate mothers, fathers or any other significant adult, as it can be in our case, teachers – male and female – so that they become the primary focus of the implemented actions. We cannot expect that the minors will lodge complaints against the abusers. So, in our programs of prevention we must supply the significant adults with tools that will allow them to uncover potential cases of abuse or actual cases of it. In this line of action, the adult's role consists not only in alerting the minors about the dangers that lie in wait for them, he/she must also actively deploy resources of protection for them.
- b) that in our schools and community centers, the programs of Integral Education of Sexuality must aim at placing sexual abuse in the context of a positive and open view of sexuality. This has to be done taking into account the different levels of age of the minors and sending clear messages to free the victims from guilt.

In some countries there exist protocols of prevention and action resulting from national legislations and/or from norms of the Society of Jesus. We urge every national Fe y Alegría that does not have such tools, to produce and to enact the said protocols and norms in their country and regional offices, in their schools and in their

educational programs. To those who will ask, we can send the existing protocols, manuals and norms.

Because of all this, the Directive Committee and the Country Directors of Fe y Alegría, as representatives of all the Movement, we commit ourselves to sign the present Manifesto so that all the people who take part in our mission become aware of the magnitude of the problem we are facing and unite their efforts, resources and wills to do everything we can in favor of the rights of children and adolescents and against every type of sexual exploitation and abuse, discerning in each country the best resources and measures to prevent and fight this scourge in accord with the principles and the positive legislation of each jurisdiction.

MANIFESTO

LIFE: THE BEST CREATION

LIVING WITH DIGNITY AND FREEDOM: A RIGHT FOR ALL

1. The International Federation Fe y Alegría - as a Movement of Integral Popular Education and Social Promotion - collaborates, works, strives and, out of its mission and vision, has some incidence on “a world where everybody has the possibility to be educated, to develop their capacities fully and to live with dignity, by ways of building societies in which all structures are to the service of the human being and by transforming the situations that generate inequity, poverty and exclusion”⁵.
2. From our educative paradigm, the Integral Popular Education and Social Promotion tend towards the promotion of the human person and of his/her dignity. It's this ideal that leads us to announce a new society, nourished by the assertion and the advocacy of human rights.
3. This immense task finds its meaning and measure daily from the fact that, in all corners of the world, every second and under different ways, the rights of millions of children, youngsters and adults get violated and undermined.
Regrettably, abuse and violence are growing and become a scourge that limits

⁵ III Plan Estratégico de la Federación Internacional Fe y Alegría 2010 – 2014.

the possibility that all people, especially girls and women, are able to live with complete dignity.

4. We are a Movement that grows and is immersed in our contemporary world. This world is more and more plural and diverse, global and interdependent, but it is also a world where processes of inclusion and exclusion take place, a sick world that needs healing. For this, we work at the change of situations that generate pain, inequity and injustice. In face of this outrageous reality, we feel bound by the ethical, political and social obligation to denounce all kinds of abuse of rights and to work to stop this blight.
5. Abuse and violence destroy the potentialities of the human being by casting a slur on the dignity of people. The Declaration of Human Rights of the United Nations in 1948 stated that “all the human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights; rights and liberties that each person must exercise without any distinction of race, color, sex, language, religion, political opinion or of any other kind, national or social origin, economic standing, birth, or any other condition” .⁶
6. We are convinced that where there is a situation of abuse or violence, there must be denunciation and appropriate actions. In Fe y Alegría, we work to make our schools and community centers areas of solidarity, mutual help where we live relationships of brotherhood, respect, justice, esteem and love.
7. In our daily fight, we state that “every promotional action arises out of a regard to each person as a free and creative subject who lives in relation with the environment and with the others. Looking at the person as citizen, as God’s child, helps us to acknowledge in him/her a subject of duties and rights, called to live out responsible freedom” .⁷
8. We acknowledge that families and States are the first instances responsible for children and adolescents to lead dignified lives, free of violence. For this, we ask governments and their institutions to set about all necessary actions at

⁶ Artículos 1 y 2 Declaración Universal de Derechos Humanos. Asamblea General de Naciones Unidas, 1948.

⁷ Educación y Promoción Social Comunitaria. Documentos del XXXVII Congreso Internacional de Fe y Alegría. Revista Internacional Fe y Alegría N° 8 /Año / 2007.

local, national, regional and international levels to ensure that children and adolescents lead a life without violence, this in accordance with art. 19 of the Convention of Rights of Children.⁸

9. We urge all the organizations and social networks committed for human rights and against violence, to work united. Prevention of abuse, denunciation and appropriate actions in face of those crimes must be a task for all of us.
10. Because of all this, we commit ourselves so that in all our structures, schools and community centers, in all our areas of action of the Movement, we'll adopt every necessary and appropriate measure to protect children, adolescents and adults against any form of abuse: physical or mental, or of negligence, or of ill treatment, or of exploitation, especially of sexual abuse and exploitation and of any explicit and implicit indication of violence.

⁸Convención de los Derechos del Niño (1989), art. 19