



Grooming Techniques

Techniques used by perpetrators in Cambodia

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Action Pour Les Enfants

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1.0 Introduction

Action Pour Les Enfants (APLE) Cambodia is a Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) with no religious and political affiliations. For the past ten years, Action Pour les Enfants has pursued the vision of securing freedom from sexual abuse and exploitation for all children. It has continually worked to protect children from sexual abuse and exploitation, and prosecute those who commit the grave crime of abusing children.

Since the PROTECT project was started in 2003 until the end of 2012, APLE's investigation have led to the arrest of 248 suspects. This eventually led to the successful conviction of 165 offenders. In addition, APLE has provided legal assistance to 501 victims in 252 trials and social assistance to 562 victims in the same period.

Although different types of cases are dealt with, APLE has a focus on street-based exploitation. In general, street-based exploitation is facilitated personally by the sex offender. The first encounter is initiated in a public area and the goal is to establish a sexual relationship with the target. Characteristic for this kind of exploitation, contrary to establishment-based exploitation, offenders are mostly Western and victims mostly boys.

A technique often used in street-based exploitation is grooming. "Grooming", in this publication, is a term that describes the techniques and behaviors that child sex offenders use to develop a relationship of trust, control and dependence with their victims (and often the victims' families and communities). Common techniques for travelling child sex offenders are to provide their victims, the victim's family or the victim's community with monetary support, food and shelter, gifts, holidays and education. The giving or withholding of rewards, in the form of money, gifts or

attention, can be used in a later stage to misuse the relationship of power. Some offenders develop a 'godfather' relationship with victims and their families. They present themselves as a caring 'uncle' who is only concerned with the best interests of the child, his or her family and the community (Keane, 2006).

25 interviews were conducted with child survivors with whom APLE dealt with in the last ten years. They were asked about the grooming techniques used by the offender. The aim of this research is to provide more insight in how offenders approach children and what tricks they use in order to establish a sexual relationship with their victims.

2.0 Methodology

2.1 Data Collection

Data was collected between February 2013 and May 2013. In order to prevent the former victims to get more traumatized and to obtain the most valuable from this group of respondents, the following criteria were set:

- Victimization should be at least one year ago.
- Respondent should be at least 12 years of age.
- Suspect should be convicted (cases in which the suspect was convicted by the court of first instance, but the appeal court was still ongoing are allowed).

Respondents had to sign a consent form before the interview started. The consent form explained that the interview could be stopped at any point by the respondent. The respondent could refuse to answer any question he or she did not want to answer. Also they got told that APLE would maintain their confidentiality and his/her identifiable information would not be included in the report. Finally, the respondents were told that

the interview would be used in order to get more insight in the approaches of perpetrators.

The interview took place at a location of the respondent's preference.

Both interviewers spoke English and no Khmer. A translator therefore would translate the questions into Khmer and translate the answers into English. The translator was good informed about the objectives of the interview and encouraged to ask the questions in a child-friendly manner.

2.2 Questions

A total of 38 questions were asked to the respondents. The first seven questions were about the background of the respondent. Question 8 until 15 were about the grooming techniques used by the offender. Finally, the questions 16 to 38 were about APLE's services. The results from these last questions are not used in this report. Question 8 until 15 were read loudly to the respondents and they were all open-ended questions. They are listed below:

- 1: Where did you first meet the perpetrator?
- 2: Did you go to school at that moment?
- 3: Ask the following questions and try to get as much information as possible about the contact between the victim and the perpetrator, what did the perpetrator do to get in contact with you, did he ever bring you somewhere, did he ever give you something, did he ever say something about you, can you describe what happened till the moment the perpetrator got arrested?
4. Did the perpetrator ever call you on your phone?
 - 4a: Did the perpetrator ever E-mail you?
 - 4b: Did the perpetrator ever Facebook you?

5: What did your parent think about the abuser?

5a: Why

6: Were there any adults that knew about the abuse?

7: Did the perpetrator say or do anything after the abuse happened so that no-one would know about the abuse?

8: How did the abuse stop?

When asked about grooming techniques children were invited to tell as much as possible about their contact with the perpetrator. Whenever a child showed, however, a real sense of discomfort we would move on to the next question or even skip all the remaining questions depending on how the child's well-being was evaluated.

3.0 Results

3.1 Demographics

On average the interviewees were 17.5 years of age during the time they were interviewed. Ten were female (40 percent) and 15 were male (60 percent). Their perpetrators were all male (100 percent). At the time that the interviews were conducted 44 percent of the former victims went to school or some kind of training program. A total of 65 percent of the respondent had a job at the time of the interview. Job differed from garbage collector till motor repairer. 10 percent of the respondents did not have a job and neither attended school.

3.2 First Meeting Place

When asked about the first meeting place most children tell that they met the perpetrator at a public place. This can be at the riverside, at a market or close to a temple or supermarket. Some however tell that they met the perpetrator close or in their

work environment. The perpetrator was a teacher at a school for example. Finally, a few children met the perpetrator in the perpetrator's guesthouse or own house.

55 percent of the respondents went to school at the time they met the perpetrator. Slightly less than half (45 percent) did not go to school when they met the perpetrator. One child says:

"I stopped school when I met him."

3.3 Grooming techniques

Most respondents talk about getting money (65.2 percent), food (47.8 percent), presents (39.1 percent) or clothing (21.7 percent) from the perpetrator. More than 20 percent of the respondents were taken on trips as well. Respondents say about this:

"He did not say anything, but brought me around sightseeing, gave me food and clothing."

"He gave me money. He wanted me to come to his house. The second time he wanted me to come to his house again and I did and watched TV there. He gave me a Coke and I felt asleep. I don't know what happened but the next day I felt hurt. Despite this I kept going to him every day after that."

"He brought me to his shop, gave me money, bought me a phone took me to the waterpark and wanted me to work in his shop as a waitress."

"He brought me and a friend to the sea and we went on a jet-ski, afterwards he gave money."

“He gave me money, presents and dinner. He wanted me to buy a phone with the money but I never did because my family did not let me. I was too young to have one.”

More than fifteen percent of the respondents talks about the perpetrator hugging with them. One child speaks about kissing with the perpetrator.

“When I went swimming he followed me. The touching started after several years.”

Table 1: grooming techniques used by the offenders (N = 21)

Grooming technique	Percentage “Yes”	Percentage “No”
Giving money	71.4	28.6
Go to his home	57.1	42.9
Taking out for dinner	52.3	47.7
Giving presents	42.9	57.1
Sleep at his place	38.1	61.9
Giving clothing	23.8	86.2
Taking on trips	23.8	86.2
Hugs	19.0	81.0
Photo taking	14.3	85.7
Drugs	14.3	85.7
Kisses	4.8	95.2
Made me change clothing	4.8	95.2
Showed dirty pictures	4.8	95.2

One child talks about sex movies he had to see:

“On the way back home, I cut wood for my family and the foreigner helped me. The next day he helped again and afterwards he showed us a sex movie (showed it to two boys).”

Although many people think that child sexual abuse involves violence, only one person talks about clear violence while most children felt as if they were only persuaded:

“He forced me with a knife to have sex with him.”

“He asked me to play with his penis and he gave me one dollar. It happened along the road he just persuaded me to do that. It only happened once.”

Three children speak about drugs and alcohol being involved in the grooming process:

“I greeted him, and he gave me money. After a week I went to his house and there was a friend who knew the perpetrator. When the perpetrator came in he gave me money for drugs (I did not use drugs before that time.).”

“Then the perpetrator forced me to drink beer and afterwards he took me to his house where I stayed for five days before they let me go. I lost control over my body during that time.”

“American took me to his guesthouse and gave me drugs. He took of my clothes while I was unconscious. He promised money if I went with him.”

3.4 Information Technology

Only 14.2 percent of the respondents talks about having contact with the perpetrator through a mobile phone. E-mail and Facebook aren't used as a way communication in

any of the cases. This might be due to the fact that most children don't have access to internet.

3.5 Parents

From the 17 respondent who answered this question, 52.9 percent said his or her parents did not know the perpetrator. In 29.4 percent of the cases, however, the parents did know the perpetrator and even liked him. Thus there was personal contact between the perpetrator and the parents of the child. The respondents say the following about this:

"My parents knew him and thought he was a nice man, because he bought stuff for other people."

"My mother knew him and she liked him, because he was like an adoptive father."

"My mother knew him and she liked him. She did not know about the abuse"

3.6 Keeping Silence

More than fifty percent of the respondents tell about tricks used by the perpetrator to keep them silent after the abuse (52.6 percent). Most were kept silent by giving them money or promising money (21.1 percent). Others used a wide variety of techniques:

"He said he would not take me to his house anymore."

"He told me, don't tell anybody. Also he gave me 5000 Riel."

"He said, come tomorrow again I will give you money."

“He told me that if I would tell, he would deny it and nobody would believe me.”

3.7 Stop

Almost seventy percent (68.2) of the respondents tell that the abuse only stopped when the perpetrator was arrested. Only in one case (4.8 percent) the respondent told that the abuse stopped because the respondent did not go there anymore.

4.0 Discussion

This research follows a qualitative approach, involving the use of semi-structured interviews as the primary method to describe the perception and experience of child victims. It is limited in its scope since only 25 victims were interviewed due to time and financial constraints.

Both interviewers were non-Khmer speaking. In order to conduct the interview a translator was needed. The used translation during the interviews, results in information lose and might even have caused some misunderstandings.

This study relies heavily on the memory of the child victims. Their memories may be skewed, exaggerated or the victims may simply have difficulty remembering details.

5.0 Conclusion

Perpetrators meet their victims generally speaking on three different places. The most popular meeting place is in a public place (market, beach, etc.). Other places that were

mentioned by some respondents were in the house of the perpetrators and at school (perpetrators was a teacher).

Despite the fact that often people think that only children who don't go to school are vulnerable, more than half of the children did go to school at the time they were victimized. Thus, not only children who don't go to school are vulnerable for street-based sexual abuse.

Most of the perpetrators give things to the children they try to groom. The gifts can be money, presents, food, clothing or other things of value. Also bringing the children on trips is used as a grooming technique. Two perpetrators brought their victims to swim. This of course gives an excellent opportunity to touch the child during a play.

While some children talk about hugging or kissing with the perpetrator, only one child speaks about violence from the perpetrator. This is in line with the research in this field that children often are persuaded and tricked into sexual activity.

Quite some children speak about going to the house of the perpetrator. There is a lot to gain when it comes to this point. Awareness should prevent children from going to houses of perpetrators.

Some children in this research speak about drugs or alcohol. They tell that the perpetrator give them alcohol or drugs before they abused them.

It is interesting that many of the parents of the victims knew the perpetrator. Even worse, they liked the perpetrator. Child abusers are very good in self-presentation and don't only groom children but also groom their environment. They groom everybody

around the child and as a result of this the child will feel even more resistance to disclose the abuse.

Besides tricks to develop a sexual relationship with the child, the perpetrator use also all kinds of tricks to make sure that the victim will not disclose the abuse to anyone else. Often they will give money or some other present to the child. Some perpetrators on the other hand, threaten the child. One of the perpetrators said that he would deny the abuse and that nobody would believe the child. This could actually be true if the perpetrator also made an effort in grooming the environment of the child.

Abuse almost only ends when a perpetrator is arrested. Of all cases only one child did not go to the perpetrator anymore and stopped the abuse by doing that. Most children, however, are in a situation in which abuse can endure for years if nobody stops the perpetrator.

6.0 Sources

Keane, K. (2006). Street-Based Child Sexual Exploitation in Phnom Penh and Sihanoukville: A Profile of Victims, Phnom Penh: Action Pour Les Enfants