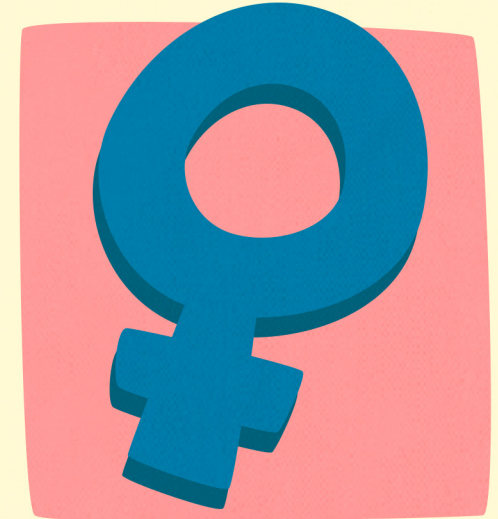


Strengthening the Partnership between Official Institutions & Civil Society Organizations to Combat Sexual Violence Against Minors in Egypt

Public Policy Paper



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Public Policy Paper:

This public policy paper was written by the Bent El Nile\ Daughter of the Nile Foundation.



1. Executive Summary:

The recent observational report issued by the Bent El Nile Foundation and the Daftar Ahwal Institute during the period between 2020 to 2023; revealed a high incidence of sexual violence crimes against minors exceeding thousands, and the absence of an effective role by official entities and civil society organizations, with a participation rate not exceeding 1.7% in fulfilling their roles. The analysis also showed that a significant portion of these crimes are centered around «indecent assault,» and that almost all perpetrators are typically male Egyptians, reflecting the problem's roots and urgency, necessitating immediate and comprehensive intervention from a feminist perspective.

Furthermore, all the alternatives presented in the policy paper through a rights-based feminist approach emphasized the importance of enhancing cooperation between official entities, civil society organizations, and local communities, highlighting the need for an integrated and comprehensive approach that includes awareness and feminist education, strengthening local to local and local to international partnerships, research and data collection, providing support and protection, enhancing reporting and access to justice. Additionally, it stressed the necessity of working on legislative and legal reforms to provide a safe environment that protects minors from harm and aids in mitigating the negative impacts on the psychological and physical health of the victims/survivors. Solving this complex issue and reducing its severity requires broad cooperation and simultaneous implementation of all proposed strategies, in detail, to ensure effective results in combating violence against minors.

2. Problem Statement:

The pressing issue revolves around the dynamics of sexual violence against minors in Egypt currently, focusing on how patriarchal systems and male authority influence the prevalence of these crimes, as found in the observational report between 2020 to 2023 – further details can be seen via this link- where statistics highlighted that the rate of repeat offenses reached 16.4%, indicating the depth of the problem within social and cultural structures. Moreover, the COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated the situation, with minors, especially in 2021, becoming more vulnerable to violence during lockdown periods, and the overwhelming majority of perpetrators being male, accounting for 98%, most of whom are Egyptian (99.6%). This reflects the intrinsic nature of the issue and its deep-rootedness in Egyptian society. The analysis also shows disparities in reporting these crimes across provinces, with a high concentration in central provinces, considering the hindrance in data availability from other provinces that did not register high rates of such crimes.

The report also highlighted; that the majority of crimes were classified under «indecent assault» with a rate of 94.6%, indicating the need to address the patriarchal roots of violence and develop preventive strategies that tackle the specific dimensions of Egyptian society. Additionally, the observational report on the absence of the role of official campaigns, security forces, and civil society organizations in reporting sexual violence crimes against minors in Egypt reveals a notable reality, where data indicates that the contribution of these efforts in reporting these crimes did not exceed 1.7%; highlighting the necessity of enhancing these efforts towards sexual violence at the grassroots level.

This minimal percentage reflects a significant challenge in how the security system and society deal with this serious issue, calling for the necessity to reevaluate and enhance the role of official campaigns and the participation of civil society organizations in exposing these crimes and supporting the victims/survivors. There is also a need

to develop effective strategies and programs aimed at empowering individuals and communities for effective reporting of sexual violence, and ensuring the provision of a safe environment that protects minors from harm. These causes lead to devastating outcomes on the psychological and physical health of the victims/survivors, affecting their ability to learn and continue their lives normally, and may lead to their social isolation. The latest statistics indicate that sexual violence against minors in Egypt is a problem of significant dimensions, yet the reporting of cases remains below the actual level due to stigma and fear of social consequences.

3. Current Situation:

This main section is divided into an analysis of existing policies through positive and negative indicators of these policies, then highlights the stakeholders concerned with the phenomenon of sexual violence against minors, and finally, reviews the most important successful international experiences.

Therefore, the problem of sexual violence against minors is rooted in several complex and interrelated factors, including patriarchal systems and traditional gender beliefs that reinforce stereotypes and diminish children's rights, especially girls. Additionally, challenges in current legislation and its effective implementation add another obstacle to combating this issue, alongside the absence of the role of official institutions and civil society organizations, and a lack of comprehensive awareness and education about the rights of children/minors and how to protect them from violence.

Indicators of the current situation:

The positive indicators (according to official statements)

Include the provision of reporting and support services, such as:

- Include the provision of reporting and support services, such as:
- Availability of a legal support network through the National Council for Women's complaint office.
- Hotlines for reporting sexual violence crimes, offering support and advice, notably the Child Helpline and the complaint line of the National Council for Women.
- Psychological, social support services, and referral to relevant entities.
- A code of conduct to enhance women's safe mobility in the transport sector.
- Anti-harassment and violence units in universities and university hospitals.

The negative indicators include:

Persistent Sexual Violence: Despite the presence of several positive indicators mentioned earlier, cases of sexual violence against minors remain a persistent and urgent problem, with reports of recurring harassment and sexual assault against minors.

- The Violence Against Women Unit at the Ministry of Justice and units within the Ministry of Interior.
- The establishment of 27 digital family offices at the Public Prosecution Office.
- Training for judges, doctors, psychologists, social workers, police officers, and representatives of anti-violence units.
- The initiative to create a comprehensive unit for protection from violence against women by a decision of the Prime Minister.

There are also several national strategies regarding combating sexual violence, including:

- The National Strategy to Eliminate Violence Against Women 2015-2020- and the National Strategy for the Empowerment of Egyptian Women 2030, focusing on political, economic, social empowerment, and protection from violence in women's empowerment strategies.
- The National Strategy for Human Rights in Egypt 2021.
- The National Strategy for Alternative Care for Children and Youth in Egypt 2021 - 2030.

Ineffective Activation of Procedures: Many of the previously mentioned measures, in terms of reporting mechanisms or service provision, are not efficiently, effectively, and comprehensively activated, and there is a lack of a feminist perspective in implementation.

Weak Implementation and Accountability: There are challenges in effectively implementing laws and ensuring accountability for perpetrators, including difficulties in reporting crimes and investigating them appropriately.

Stigma and Stereotypes: Social stigma and gender stereotypes continue to hinder public discussion on sexual violence and affect the victims' ability to seek support and justice.

Legislative and Legal Challenges: Concerning definitions related to sexual violence crimes, notably the definition of indecent assault, which is still considered a moral crime rather than a sexual violence crime, affecting the reporting and penalties for the crime, in addition to the societal stigma on the victim/survivor.

Challenges in Accessing Justice and Support: Women and girls who are subjected to sexual violence may find it difficult to access legal services and psychological support due to cultural and economic barriers.

Stakeholders:

Combating sexual violence against minors requires cooperation and coordination among various stakeholders, from official bodies and local communities to civil society organizations, centrally as follows:

Stakeholders

- National Council for Women
- National Council for Childhood and Motherhood
- Ministry of Social Solidarity
- All civil society organizations concerned with children's rights
- All feminist organizations and initiatives focused on achieving gender equality
- Ministry of Interior and the Public Prosecution
- The Egyptian Parliament / Political parties
- Ministry of Justice
- Local centers and units
- Families
- Media platforms (visual media and journalism)
- Ministry of Education
- Ministry of Higher Education
- Ministry of Health

Effectively engaging these stakeholders requires the development of comprehensive communication and collaboration strategies that take into account the different interests and aim to achieve a common goal: protecting minors from sexual violence and ensuring a safe environment for them. This includes enabling them to report incidents and minimizing the psychological and serious negative effects resulting from sexual violence.

Accordingly, it's possible to highlight **the best international practices** adopted by Sweden, Norway, Canada, Australia, and Finland, respectively. However, particularly noteworthy is Sweden's approach to the issue of sexual violence against minors. Sweden adopts a comprehensive and pioneering feminist approach to combating sexual violence against minors, based on stringent legislation, comprehensive education and awareness, and multifaceted support for victims/survivors.

This approach reflects Sweden's commitment to enhancing sexual and reproductive rights as an integral part of human rights, with a special focus on protecting children and adolescents. By criminalizing sexual violence based on the concept of «consent» and offering educational programs aimed at dismantling gender-based stereotypes, and providing the best comprehensive support services for victims/survivors, including psychological and legal care, it showcases a victim/survivor-centered approach, with an emphasis on minimizing harm and promoting recovery. The Swedish model highlights the role of feminist policies in achieving a safer and more just society for minors, illustrating the importance of an integrated approach that includes legislation, education, support, and ongoing partnership between official bodies and civil society organizations in addressing and preventing sexual violence.

4. Evaluation of Alternatives:

To evaluate each alternative for enhancing cooperation between the state and civil society in combating sexual violence against minors in the Egyptian context, we will consider criteria such as cost, community acceptance, efficiency and feasibility, political acceptability, governance, and legality. A scoring approach will be followed for each criterion, where (0) means it is poor, (1) means it is a moderate criterion, and (2) means it is a good criterion. Considering that a higher evaluation indicates the superiority of the alternative, we can evaluate the proposed alternatives as follows:

Proposed Alternative/ Evaluation Criteria	Cost	Cost	Efficiency and Feasibility	Political Acceptance	Governance	Legal necessity	Total Points
Legislative and Legal Reforms	Medium to low. The cost of legislative amendments may be limited compared to implementation programs.	Ambivalent. However, it tends towards moderate support.	High. Legal reforms are essential to provide the necessary protective framework.	Varied, low. It requires support from various actors in the Parliament and the Egyptian government.	High. Clarifying laws and regulations improves governance.	is essential but ranks low in terms of practical application.	6

<p>Awareness and Feminist Education</p>	<p>Medium. Awareness and educational campaigns are costly but essential and already in place; however, they need to be activated.</p>	<p>Moderately low. Due to efforts to change the social-cultural perspective and reduce societal stigma.</p>	<p>High. Education enhances behavior change and helps in reducing sexual violence against minors.</p>	<p>Moderately high. Because it would represent an important part of public policies and the activation</p>	<p>Medium. Requires coordination between ministries and participating organizations.</p>	<p>High. Because it does not represent any breach of laws.</p>	<p>9</p>
<p>Providing Support and Protection</p>	<p>High. Establishing and operating support centers requires significant financial and human resources.</p>	<p>High. Due to the need for the presence and activation of support mechanisms for victims/survivors of sexual violence.</p>	<p>High. Direct support is crucial for the recovery of victims/survivors from violence.</p>	<p>Medium to high. It depends on the political will to provide these operational/technical resources.</p>	<p>Governance High. Clarifying laws and regulations improves governance. Medium. Requires coordination between ministries and participating organizations. Medium to High. Requires coordination between different bodies.</p>	<p>High. Because it does not represent any breach of laws.</p>	<p>8</p>

<p>Enhancing Reporting and Access to Justice</p>	<p>Medium. Requires training tools and the development of justice and service systems.</p>	<p>High. There is support for improving victims/survivors' access to justice.</p>	<p>High. To ensure accountability, justice, and follow-up and evaluation.</p>	<p>Medium - medium. Depends on the commitment of official entities to human and children's rights, including girls.</p>	<p>Medium. Requires ongoing commitment from official institutions, local centers, and relevant civil society organizations.</p>	<p>Medium. It primarily depends on reforms in the judicial system, as well as on the legal definition of these crimes, their enforcement, and the penalties prescribed for them.</p>	<p>8</p>
<p>Research and Data Collection</p>	<p>Medium. Research requires resources but provides essential data for planning.</p>	<p>Medium. There may be sensitivities around data collection.</p>	<p>High. Data is important for guiding policies and programs.</p>	<p>Medium - medium. Data helps in making political decisions.</p>	<p>High. Research enhances transparency and accountability.</p>	<p>Medium. Because it does not breach laws but faces a challenge in data secrecy and anonymity of the perpetrators' characteristics.</p>	<p>8</p>

<p>Strengthening Local-Local and Local-International Partnerships</p>	<p>Medium to low. Costs can be reduced through shared resources and expertise.</p>	<p>Medium to medium. It is seen as a way to improve experiences and resources but faces the obstacle of patriarchal-male culture.</p>	<p>High. Contributes to the exchange of expertise and best practices.</p>	<p>Medium - high. Depends on international relations and commitments among all parties.</p>	<p>Medium to High. Requires ongoing coordination and cooperation between local-local organizations and local-international organizations.</p>	<p>High. Because it does not represent any breach of laws, and is capable of maintaining local privacies.</p>	<p>8</p>
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5. Recommendations:

In light of the foregoing, it is evident that all the proposed alternatives are essential for achieving comprehensive and integrated results. Implementation should be simultaneous and cover all presented aspects, starting from awareness and feminist education, followed by enhancing cooperation between local and international institutions, working on data collection and research, providing necessary support and protection, improving reporting mechanisms and facilitating access to justice, and finally, working on legislative and legal reforms, respectively. It is important to note that the effectiveness of the last alternative may be limited under the current context, but it can be pursued on a separate timeline.

These presented alternatives highlight the necessity of applying an integrated approach with a feminist perspective, addressing the problem at all levels, and enhancing the effectiveness of the strategies followed in combating violence against minors.