

# **HIDDEN WORLDS**

**boys, abuse and prostitution**

Dirk J. Korf  
Annemieke Benschop  
Jaap Knotter

with contributions by:

Ton Nabben  
Nazly Saadat  
Zawdie Sandvliet  
Jari Steingröver  
Karin Wesselink  
Merel Wissink

This study was conducted by the Bonger Institute of Criminology of the University of Amsterdam. It was commissioned by the Research and Documentation Centre (WODC) of the Netherlands Ministry of Justice.

English summary translated by Michael Dallas.

Korf D.J., Benschop A. & Knotter J. (2009) *VERBORGEN WERELDEN: minderjarige jongens, misbruik en prostitutie*. Amsterdam: Rozenberg Publishers.

ISBN 978 90 361 0121 9

© The authors, 2009

## English summary

Boys who are victims of sexual abuse and boys who work in prostitution are groups that remain largely hidden from the public eye. This study attempted to enter the world of these boys. Primary research questions were:

1. *How many boys become victims of sexual abuse?*
2. *What is known about the nature and circumstances of the sexual abuse of boys?*
3. *How many boys work in prostitution, and in what types of prostitution?*
4. *What is known about the nature and circumstances of these types of prostitution?*
5. *Can we learn more about the ethnic backgrounds of boy victims and sex workers?*
6. *Do the social and health services have sufficient knowledge of the various groups of boy victims and sex workers?*

Our focus was on boys of *minor age* (younger than 18). With respect to sexual abuse, the emphasis was on incidents *outside* the boys' family sphere; we confined ourselves to boys who became victims of sexual abuse before the age of 18. With respect to boy sex workers (boys that have sex with men in exchange for money or other material compensation), we set a maximum age of 21, but interviewed only youths that had begun having paid sex before age 18. The study was concentrated in Amsterdam and in the eastern Dutch region of Twente. By analysing figures on the sexual abuse of boys, we attempted to arrive at nationwide estimates.

### **1 Boys as victims of sexual abuse outside the family**

We sought to obtain figures on the sexual abuse of minor-aged boys from two sources: health or social services and police departments. Health and social workers reported having no knowledge of the scale of sexual abuse among their clients. When they did have suspicions, they could not or would not express them in figures. In other words, no 'hard' social service statistics are available on the sexual abuse of boys in the Netherlands, and no 'soft' figures are available either.

Police records provide some consolation, although they are heavily dependent on victims' willingness to report offences. From police data, we can therefore estimate only the numbers of *recorded* cases of sexual abuse. We first analysed case files for the year 2007 in police departments in Amsterdam and Twente. We then processed data from all Dutch regional police registers in the period 2003-2007 on sexual offences involving boys of minor age. This brought us to an annual nationwide estimate of **680 recorded offences** of sexual abuse of boys outside the family sphere, involving about **800 recorded victims of minor age**. That would represent 0.04% of all boys under 18

in the Netherlands. These estimates are far lower than previous studies have made. The latter figures, however, either involved both boys and girls or applied to abuse both inside and outside the family. We had therefore expected to arrive at lower estimates. Moreover, our figures pertain exclusively to recorded offences, whereas other estimates were based on self-reported data.

Our analysis of the Amsterdam and Twente police files yielded the following profile of actual or suspected perpetrators of sexual abuse of boys outside the family. The vast majority were males. A large proportion were likewise of minor age; some of the latter could be classed as 'child sex offenders' (being at least five years older than their victim). There were also older, even elderly paedosexual perpetrators. It further emerged that a sizeable majority of perpetrators came from their victim's everyday surroundings, many of them being neighbours or classmates. The stereotype 'dirty old paedosexual predator lurking in the bushes' was rare, in the police records at least.

Most of the acts of abuse committed in the cases we analysed in the Amsterdam and Twente police files were 'hands-on' offences, ranging in severity from touching a clothed body to anal penetration. In more than one quarter of cases, the perpetrator tried to prevail upon the victim to perform sexual acts, showed his own genitals (which the victim did not touch) or masturbated in front of the victim (either in person or on a webcam). Touching the victim's penis, bottom or other parts of the body, either naked or clothed, also occurred in over a quarter of cases. Manual or oral sexual acts were performed both by suspects and victims. Anal penetration (sometimes using a foreign object) was performed only by perpetrators on victims.

## **2 Boy prostitution**

No reliable figures are available on how many minor-aged boys have sex with men in exchange for money; there are not even any crude empirical estimates. Yet all signs indicate that minor-aged boys are greatly in the minority among male sex workers. The existing image that relatively large numbers of young boys work in prostitution stems partly from the male sex workers themselves. Many present themselves as younger than they really are. Their age is their 'professional secret'; by acting younger, they enhance their marketability.

Boys who have sex for money or other material compensation have diverse ways of making contact with their clients. The Internet scores high. The vast majority of the 44 boys we interviewed made use of the Internet, either exclusively or in combination with other methods. Clients were also contacted in gay or other nightlife scenes, to a lesser extent in brothels or through escort services, and to a still lesser extent in public places

such as streets, parks or car parks. These client acquisition methods are basically no different from those of older youths working in prostitution, except that underaged boys do not work in brothels (at least not in those with a permit). So-called 'private homes' do exist, where young boys receive clients or from which they are taken to clients as escort boys. To an extent, minor-aged boys have fewer opportunities to recruit clients in nightlife venues. Most gay dance clubs and saunas only admit people over 18; most gay pubs admit boys at 16, the same minimum age as in other pubs. Theoretically, though, there is nothing to stop boys under 16 from recruiting clients in the immediate vicinity of gay pubs, or those under 18 near other gay venues.

There are boys that have paid sex with men and experience pleasure while doing so. With the money they earn, they are able to go out more often, buy more expensive clothes, and thus lead more luxurious lives. Other boys may engage in paid sex to keep their heads above water, have a free place to stay or help pay for an addiction. For some boys, prostitution is an almost daily activity and constitutes their most important, or only, source of income. For others, paid sex is a more sporadic activity providing a welcome income supplement. We encountered all these variants among the interviewed male sex workers under age 21.

This group of youthful male sex workers, who were one focus of our study, can be differentiated in two ways. A practical subdivision would be based on 'workplace', or the ways in which they make contact with their clients. This would distinguish between three types: boys working in brothels and/or escort services; boys that acquire clients partly or wholly through the Internet (and do not work in brothels or escort services); and the remainder who obtain clients in other ways, such as in nightlife venues, through the grapevine or on the streets (but not via the Internet). A practical advantage of such a breakdown is that it makes it easier to locate youthful sex workers – a major benefit to health and social workers. A drawback is that few significant distinctions can be drawn between these three categories in terms of issues like undesired sex experiences. In other words, although a breakdown by workplace would help in finding the various boy sex workers, it would not give much insight into what types of boys they are, what problems they might have, and whether or not they need help.

We therefore created a typology that takes those considerations into account. That led us to classify the youths into three types: (1) **pros and weekend amateurs**; (2) **victims**; and (3) **adventurers**. The parallels between this typology and the breakdown according to workplace are very limited. This alternative classification enables more insights into upbringing and education – pros and weekend amateurs were the most likely to have been brought up by both parents and to have more schooling – as well as into

differences in the problems faced. The 'victim' type – in which all boys had had sex against their will and almost all expressed needs for help in solving their problems – contrasts with the pros and weekend amateurs (of whom the large majority expressed enjoyment in having paid sex) as well as with the adventurers (who had rarely encountered violence during their sex work). Minor-aged boys were found only in the groups of victims and adventurers; the pros and weekend amateurs we interviewed were all above 18, though they had begun paid sex before that age.

The vast majority of the interviewees could not be considered professional sex workers (that is, people that view their sex work as more than a temporary activity). Such views may be partly a question of age. Virtually all youths described in the literature as professional sex workers are above 18, and many are above 21. The youths we interviewed were all younger than 21. It is therefore conceivable that some percentage of the interviewed youths who did not yet qualify as professional sex workers might develop into professionals later. That would be most plausible for the youths now classed as adventurers. They were the youngest boys in the sample on average, and some of them reported enjoying paid sex so much that they could develop into true professionals.

### **3 Victimization, coercion, boy prostitution and social services**

The degree to which the interviewed boy sex workers had experienced sexual abuse depends on how one defines sexual abuse. Under the broadest definition, all of them had been victims of sexual abuse and coercion, since all had had sexual contacts at a minor age with a person 'in a position of power' (an adult or a minor at least five years older), and all had had sex in exchange for money or other material compensation before age 18. The boys themselves did not always regard these experiences as sexual abuse. At the same time, many of them reported having had experiences that they did perceive as sexual abuse and coercion. Nearly half of the sample had had sex against their will at least once. By no means all such cases involved paid sex contacts either, thus illustrating the risks to which such youths are, or have been, exposed. Almost one in three respondents did report having encountered verbal or physical threats or violence in connection with paid sex. Not all such incidents ended in undesired sex, and some youths had learned from the experiences and taken subsequent precautions – measures that did not, however, provide complete safeguards against violence. Above all, prostitution was said to require negotiating skills, as clients who demand unsafe sex are certainly no exception.

Although our study focused on a limited time frame, we can still distinguish early and late starters on the basis of their self-reported life histories, which included such aspects

as alcohol and drug use, contacts with health and social services and police, departure from the parental home, and desired and undesired sexual experiences. None of their life courses was closely comparable. While one boy may have been taken from the home under a child order at an early age and may have later acquired a police record, another would have been growing up with his parents and attending school. In cases where respondents reported having ever been coerced into performing sex acts against their will, that occurred almost without exception *before* their first sexual act in exchange for money. This indicates a likely association between sexual abuse and boy prostitution, at least for those boys who had suffered sexual abuse; it is unclear, though, whether sexual abuse was a causal factor in prostitution. The association could also be spurious, whereby a common or third factor would explain both the sexual abuse and prostitution. At the same time, a considerable number of the interviewed boys did not report sex against their will, indicating that sexual abuse is not the only precipitating factor for an entry into boy prostitution.

Minor-aged male victims of sexual violence came into contact with a variety of social and health services, but these were generally not services specifically intended for this group. The same was true of boy sex workers, whether or not they had been victimised by sexual abuse. Specialised services for prostitution appear to reach almost exclusively the male sex workers above age 18; youths from eastern Europe are disproportionately represented there. Although minor-aged boy sex workers, of either ethnic Dutch or ethnic minority background, did often report contacts with various types of social and health services, those services were not usually aware that the boys were working in prostitution. Of all the facilities with which boy sex workers came into contact, the clinics for sexually transmitted diseases had the greatest reach by far. This suggests that such clinics have the most promising potentials for improving education and service provision to this group. At an earlier stage, advice and reporting centres for child abuse could play a key role in the early detection of the sexual abuse of boys and the provision of necessary services or referrals.

#### **4 Ethnicity of boy victims and boy sex workers**

The Dutch police record a person's nationality and country of birth. According to the official definition used by Statistics Netherlands (CBS), however, an individual's ethnicity is determined by their parents' country of birth. At the most, only first-generation ethnic minority people can therefore be identified from police records; those of the second generation, born in the Netherlands, cannot be distinguished. Because 85% of the minor-aged ethnic minority boys in the Netherlands belong to the second generation but are not identifiable as such in the police records, that data would lead to serious underestimates of the number of minority ethnic victims of sexual abuse. In analysing the

information in the Amsterdam and Twente police files, we tried to correct this shortcoming as much as possible. As far as we could determine, about one quarter of the 73 minor-aged male victims of sexual abuse outside the family sphere, as recorded there in 2007, had minority ethnic backgrounds. There was a considerable difference between Amsterdam (48% from minorities) and Twente (15% from minorities), but this parallels the population composition of the two regions. Compared to the ethnicity of males aged 0-19 in the Amsterdam general population, it would appear that ethnic Dutch, Surinamese and other non-Western (mostly African) minor-aged boys were overrepresented in the recorded cases of sexual abuse outside the family. Ethnic Turkish and Moroccan youths were underrepresented. In Twente, the ethnic distribution of the victims was broadly similar to that in the general population, but slight overrepresentations were seen for ethnic Dutch and Western ethnic minority (mainly German) victims. On the basis of the police data, we cannot confirm the assumption by some observers that ethnic Moroccan youths are overrepresented as victims of sexual abuse outside the family.

Boys working in prostitution were found to have highly diverse ethnic backgrounds. Many were born in the Netherlands of ethnic Dutch or ethnic minority parents, but other groups included boys of foreign origin who were working temporarily in the Netherlands during an apparent trek through European brothels. Some clients express preferences for youths of specific ethnicities. One such preference is for Moroccan boys. Sex workers cash in on such preferences. If a client wants a Moroccan, and a sex worker looks Moroccan in the client's eyes, then he will call himself a Moroccan. By 'playing' with ethnicity, as with age, sex workers have found an effective technique to augment their earnings. At the same time, however, when sex workers pose as Moroccans (a phenomenon we encountered relatively often), that contributes to the impression that ethnic Moroccan youths are overrepresented in boy prostitution. This is at odds with reality, as we found no evidence at all that disproportionate numbers of Moroccan boys engage in paid sex (at least not in our sample of youths under 21 who had entered prostitution before age 18).