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# Supporting Children with Problematic and Harmful Sexual Behaviours

CONACMI, Guatemala / Taller de Vida, Colombia / JUCONI, Mexico

## Sharing Paicabi's model with other Family for Every Child members in Latin America

Since 2019, Family for Every Child members from four countries in Latin America have been working together on the issue of sexual violence affecting children. As part of this working group, **Paicabi** (Chile) has shared its model on supporting children with problematic and harmful sexual behaviours and delivered specialist training on the topic for **CONACMI** (Guatemala), **JUCONI** (Mexico) and **Taller de Vida** (Colombia).

The aim of the training and the ongoing collaboration between the members is to:

- Strengthen the technical capacities of CONACMI, JUCONI and Taller de Vida staff to prevent and respond to problematic and harmful sexual behaviours in children.
- Raise awareness and improve understanding of the issue among civil society, government organisations and the legal systems in each of the three countries. The aim is to embed the issue in their agendas and effectively address problematic and harmful sexual behaviour in children.

Read on to find out how each member has adapted the learning from Paicabi so far.

## CONACMI, Guatemala

### Introduction

CONACMI's work focuses on the prevention of violence against children and young people, in particular sexual abuse. It provides victims with practical help to overcome their trauma. Through direct support services, help to institutions to strengthen their responses, and research into cross-generational violence, CONACMI works to keep future generations protected from abuse.

On average, 16 children and adolescents present themselves at medical centres every day in Guatemala for examinations following sexual abuse. There is currently no judicial framework in Guatemala to recognise the sexual abuse of children by other children nor any policies that address the issue. Children who demonstrate harmful sexual behaviours are stigmatised and criminalised.

### Adapting Paicabi's model

CONACMI has adapted and developed the training it received from Paicabi into its own four-stage training programme for professionals working in children's care and protection. The training aims to improve specialist knowledge of problematic and harmful sexual behaviours. Professionals who successfully complete CONACMI's training are able to identify problematic and harmful sexual behaviours and have the basic skillset and tools necessary to address these behaviours with children and their parents or caregivers. CONACMI offers the training both virtually and in-person with each of the four modules running for one week. The modules cover the following content areas:

1. Key concepts: definitions of sexual abuse, indicators of abuse, children's developmental stages, healthy sexuality.
2. Definitions of problematic and harmful sexual behaviours

“The problem of problematic sexual behaviour is not the children but how we as adults perceive it.”

**Miguel Ángel López Guerra**  
Executive Director, CONACMI

3. Addressing harmful sexual behaviours: identifying these behaviours and working with children, parents and caregivers.
4. Prevention: approaches to prevent problematic and harmful sexual behaviours.

CONACMI has also adapted and contextualised Paicabi's materials for its own work by developing [three guides](#): one for children, one for parents and one for teachers. It has printed 5,000 copies of each document and shares these materials with participants on its training.

## Impact

- Between 2020 and 2022, CONACMI delivered training to a total of 446 professionals, including social workers, psychologists, teachers, doctors and nurses from two hospitals and university students.
- Offering its training virtually has enabled CONACMI to reach more professionals outside of the capital, Guatemala City, including those in rural areas and indigenous communities.

## Next steps

While CONACMI has a well-established recovery and rehabilitation centre for children who have suffered from sexual violence, it recognises its limitations in providing specialised therapeutic interventions to children who have demonstrated problematic and harmful sexual behaviour. CONACMI would like to continue to learn from Paicabi in relation to the specialised therapeutic approaches in order to expand its work in this area.

CONACMI is also committed to continuing to raise awareness of this issue in Guatemala and to changing the response toward these children from criminalisation to one of rehabilitation and protection.

## Challenges

- Sexuality is still a taboo topic in Guatemala: CONACMI faces many prejudices in addressing the issues of problematic and harmful sexual behaviours.
- The child protection system in Guatemala is not effective and does not have the necessary resources to function properly or to take responsibility for child protection in the country, so this then falls to NGOs like CONACMI.

## Top tips

- 1 Talk to children about sexuality; we need to normalise the topic in order to help them learn.
- 2 It is important to recognise your own feelings and prejudices. Before helping others, look at yourself and see how you deal with and talk about this topic.

## CONTACT DETAILS

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## Taller de Vida, Colombia

# Introduction

Established in 1996, Taller de Vida (TdV) works with children affected by the armed conflict in Colombia. It provides safe spaces for former child soldiers and for young people at risk of being recruited. Children who have been demobilised from Colombia's civil conflict are rehabilitated and reintegrated back into society and their families.

In Colombia there is no discussion at a high level of problematic and harmful sexual behaviour in children. Children who demonstrate such behaviour are regarded as offenders, are punishable in the criminal justice system and are incarcerated in young offender institutions if they are over the age of 14.

# Adapting Paicabi's model

Following Paicabi's training, Taller de Vida has been able to respond to cases of problematic and harmful sexual behaviour, providing support to other organisations, including five educational institutions. It has also supported interventions and conducted training sessions with families in which it has used a psychosocial approach. Paicabi has supported TdV by providing advice on its responses to these cases.

Taller de Vida invited professionals from a wide variety of organisations and public bodies to join the training that Paicabi delivered in Colombia. Watch this [short video](#) to see the training in action and hear from participants. This included representatives from the Colombian Institute of Family Welfare, the Ombudsman's Office, family commissioners, educational institutions, governments of indigenous communities and organisations that provide care for young offenders. Participants have retained a high level of contact and continue to develop targeted actions and support each other's work in addressing the issue of problematic and harmful sexual behaviour.

# Impact

- TdV has responded to and provided follow-up support to more than 12 cases of problematic and harmful sexual behaviour.

# Next steps

TdV would like to expand its advocacy work in collaboration with other organisations in Colombia in order to arrive at a legal definition of problematic and harmful sexual behaviour and to advocate for policies to address these behaviours, from a child rights-based approach.



## Top tips

- 1 Maintain up-to-date knowledge of the legal implications in your country for children demonstrating problematic and harmful sexual behaviour and stay abreast of policies on children's care.

## Taller de Vida

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## JUCONI, Mexico

# Introduction

JUCONI works to prevent and heal the consequences of domestic violence affecting children, youth and their families living in extreme poverty. With its educational-therapeutic methodology developed over more than 32 years of working with families, JUCONI helps children and their parents to recover from the traumas caused by violence and to acquire the emotional, cognitive and social skills they need to break the intergenerational cycle of violence and poverty and become integrated into society.

Mexico is the country with the highest rate of child sexual abuse in the world.<sup>1</sup> Ninety per cent of these violations are perpetrated against girls and occur in the family environment. The topic of problematic and harmful sexual behaviour in children is not talked about in Mexico, nor is there any specific legislation on the subject.

## Adapting Paicabi's model

Since taking part in the training with Paicabi, JUCONI has made some adaptations in its home-based interventions. Alongside its existing focus on supporting families to develop safe environments where violence and behaviour that interferes with bodily intimacy are openly discussed, JUCONI's staff are now better informed of indicators of problematic and harmful sexual behaviour and now make sure that parents are aware of how to identify this behaviour as well. It has also adapted the workshops it runs with primary caregivers to help them become more aware of their own bodies and the influence that clear limits have on the prevention of problematic and harmful sexual behaviours.

<sup>1</sup> National Commission to Prevent and Eradicate Violence against Women (CONAVIM), 2021.

# Impact

The small yet significant changes that JUCONI has made to its therapeutic work with children, families and caregivers have been beneficial in preventing incidents of sexual violence.

JUCONI's advocacy team has worked with the Commissions of Children and Adolescents of the Mexican Senate and Chamber of Deputies on actions to make visible the necessary changes to advance the issue. In 2021 the Senate approved the elimination of the statute of limitations for sexual crimes against children, however, the project is currently awaiting the final and official resolution to move forward on the matter.

## Next steps

JUCONI plans to continue deepening its knowledge on the subject of problematic and harmful sexual behaviours and to develop tools and methodologies that are tailored to its approach and context.

The authorities responsible for acting on the issue of problematic and harmful sexual behaviour in children are beginning to generate criteria for intervention. It is therefore necessary to continue promoting a culture of prevention, sex education, reporting, and specialised care for children and adolescents, to avoid re-victimisation.

## Top tips

- 1** We need to address the taboo of talking about sexuality and help those adults who find it extremely painful and confusing to engage in conversations on the topic. As such we must continue to provide precise information for adults who have not received adequate sex education themselves, as well as for children, adolescents and young people, so that they may live their sexuality beyond the adult-centric belief that sexuality is only about sexual intercourse.

# JUCONI

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