

The Truth behind the Myths:

Confronting harmful assumptions on
child sexual exploitation and abuse
(CSEA) to better protect children



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Glossary



CSAM

Child sexual abuse material



CSEA

Child sexual exploitation and abuse



OCSEA

Online child sexual exploitation and abuse



Grooming

The calculated and gradual process by which an offender sexually abuses a child



**Statute of
limitation**

The length of time in which a civil or criminal case can be brought to legal proceedings

Introduction to the toolkit

The toolkit has been designed to engage key stakeholders to confront common harmful myths about child sexual exploitation and abuse (CSEA). It is a practical resource to engage in evidence-based, reflective, and action-oriented dialogue and learning to challenge misconceptions about sexual exploitation and abuse affecting girls and boys.



The toolkit consists of three main parts:

- **Introduction (slides 5-24)**

Covering who it is for, how to use it, and why we developed it. It also includes a “scene-setting” introduction on “victim blaming” and its implications.

- **Busting “myths” (slides 25-122)**

A series of slides covering different “myths” around CSEA – touching on issues including gender of survivors, the so-called urban-rural divide, and the realities of grooming.

- **Scenarios (slides 129-205)**

These scenarios draw on ECPAT’s research to show how harmful “myths” about CSEA play out in practice, and how complicated and “blurry” these issues sometimes are.

Intended audience



The toolkit can be used in training and learning with a variety of stakeholders :

- Civil society organisations
- Law enforcement and justice professionals
- Social service providers
- Teachers or education professionals
- Government officials
- Donors
- Community representatives
- General public

How to use the toolkit?



- The toolkit is designed to be adaptable to different audiences and contexts.
- It is primarily designed for use during **in-person** or **online** activities. It provides accessible **evidence-based talking points**, **audio-visual materials**, quotes from **survivors**, **reflections** to explore the implications for policy and practice, scenarios for immersive reflection experiences to explore and dismantle stereotypes.
- Presenters can “**pick and mix**” – that is, choose the myths and scenarios they want to include, depending on what is relevant to their contexts, and how much time they have for the training. Each slide contains detailed notes to support presenters, while anyone who wants to dig deeper on a topic can consult the links in the resources section.

How to use the toolkit?



- The toolkit is designed to be **interactive and to stimulate debate**. The myths section contains a set of proposed questions that can be used for general discussion with the audience.
- Presenters can choose between using the PowerPoint presentation only, or also directing the audience to the online scenarios where they can answer questions in real time.

Contextualizing the toolkit



- The toolkit is based on existing global evidence and practices. We strongly encourage partners to **adapt the content** to their specific **audience** and local **contexts**. In doing so, users should
- Carefully consider **local beliefs, cultural and gender norms, common myths** that may influence how the content is understood
- **Translate and review** of the scenarios and materials to ensure they are accurate and culturally appropriate.
- Integrate **national or sub-national data and evidence** where available, to better reflect the realities faced by children and communities in your setting.
- Supplement the toolkit with **relevant local research**, resources, or tools that can enrich the content and increase its effectiveness.



Intro:

"Why did you do this?"





Intro: "Why did you do this?"

- To challenge common and harmful myths about child sexual exploitation and abuse
- To summarise and present the vast body of research on the topic by ECPAT and many others
- To equip ECPAT, the DtZ Alliance partners and other CSOs with new and thought-provoking ways to engage with stakeholders – whether in government, law enforcement or communities

"It was actually... Obviously at that time also, yeah, I didn't know how to handle, like, my dad crying and, like, being sad and disappointed in me because I did stuff with a guy, like. He was sad that, I don't even know why he was sad but I think he was sad about the wrong thing. I think he was asking me like, 'Why did you do that?', when the question should have been like, 'Why did he do that to you?'"

- survivor from Malaysia





It's Never their Fault:

Understanding and Preventing Victim Blaming





It's Never their Fault: Understanding and Preventing Victim Blaming

- Victim-blaming is any language or behaviour that implies (whether intentionally or unintentionally) that a person is partially or wholly responsible for abuse that has happened to them
- It implies that **the victim is at fault** in some way needs to change their behaviour rather than the abuser. It is often based on what a child is doing or saying, what they are not doing or not saying, the behaviour they display, the clothes they are wearing (or not wearing) as well as their family circumstances
- Placing the blame and responsibility on the victim / survivor in such a way is **harmful on many levels**: it impacts help seeking and access to justice, can add to trauma, and has a broader chilling effect on other survivors



It's Never their Fault: Understanding and Preventing Victim Blaming

- Many victims and survivors report feeling doubted, shamed or disbelieved
- When frontline professionals respond with respect and without displaying victim blaming language, attitudes or behaviours, it creates a **safe environment** for the child, that is **supportive and non-judgemental** and can reduce feelings of stress
- **Blaming children for abuse they have suffered is never acceptable – it is *always the offender's responsibility***



Examples of victim blaming

Directly blaming child victims for...

- Sharing sexualized images which are later shared non-consensually
- Accepting friend requests from strangers on social media
- Playing online games despite being under the age limit
- Responding to threatening or suggestive messages
- Suggesting that the child "provoked" or "invited" the abuse through their behavior, clothing, or acting in a flirtatious or otherwise "provocative" way
- Commenting that the child's use of alcohol or drugs (at the time of the abuse) could have reduced the perpetrator's responsibility
- Questioning why the child didn't resist, speak up, or leave the situation
- Criticizing the child for returning to the perpetrator or not disclosing the abuse immediately



Examples of victim blaming

Indirectly blaming child victims is more common but harder to identify – it can involve subtle use of language, or even facial expressions which inadvertently place blame on the victim...

- Telling a child after disclosure what they should have done differently
- Taking away the phone or game console after disclosing as a consequence
- Delivering safety instructions to children immediately after disclosure suggesting the child needs to change, not society or the perpetrator
- Using phrases such as: 'they put themselves at risk' or that they engage in 'risky choices' or 'risky behaviours' when describing a victim's behaviour

Guiding principles to avoid victim blaming

Focus on **what we say** to children, **how we act** (our body language or facial expressions) and **what we write** about children



1. Focus on abusive behavior: use language that emphasizes the motivations and decisions of the abusers and not the victims
 - Focus on what the abuser has done not on what the child has done or the background / circumstances of the child
 - In a situation where a child victim has run away, focus on the fact that the abuser may have taken advantage of the unstable living situation of the child

Guiding principles to avoid victim blaming

Focus on **what we say** to children, **how we act** (our body language or facial expressions) and **what we write** about children



2.

Build and maintain safety and trust with victims and survivors:
demonstrate that you can be trusted by respecting and not judging children

- Focus on building trust to create a sense of safety for victims and survivors
- Be transparent and explain what you do. For instance, if you need to use specific legal language, explain it
- Think about how something is said, as well as what is said. Always speak with kindness, understanding and empathy.

Guiding principles to avoid victim blaming

Focus on **what we say** to children, **how we act** (our body language or facial expressions) and **what we write** about children



3.

Give victims and survivors choice and control over the language used about them: ask victims and survivors about what language they prefer

- Give control and choice back to victims and survivors – this is central to the recovery and healing process.
- Think about how the language used might be experienced by victims/survivors.
- Ask children what words they prefer to describe themselves

Guiding principles to avoid victim blaming

Focus on **what we say** to children, **how we act** (our body language or facial expressions) and **what we write** about children



4.

Understand and respect victims and survivors unique experiences of sexual exploitation and abuse

- Actively listen to or find an alternative non-verbal ways to understand their experiences and keep an open mind
- Sometimes, victims and survivors do not recognise what has happened to them as abuse and may defend abusers or believe they are in positive or equal 'relationships' with abusers. In this situation, understand these perspectives but at the same time, start to sensitively challenge victims and survivors' views in ways that are respectful
- Involve victims and survivors in risk and needs assessment processes; discuss the potential risks they face and their ideas for how these risks can be mitigated

Guiding principles to avoid victim blaming

Focus on **what we say** to children, **how we act** (our body language or facial expressions) and **what we write** about children

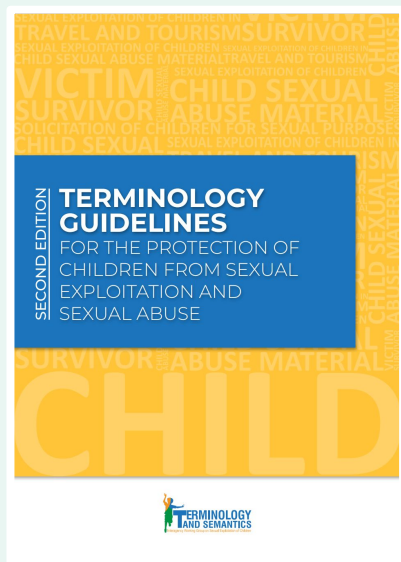


5. Be sensitive to cultural, historical, and gender issues

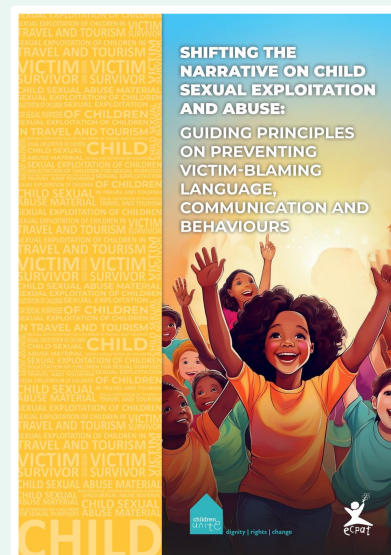
- Use culturally sensitive language and communication that challenges negative stereotypes and biases towards victims and survivors
- Be inclusive - your approach and the way you communicate language will differ depending on children's capacities and identities.
- Think about who else needs to be involved and who surrounds the child to engage them as well if appropriate



Additional resources:



- Second Edition of the [Terminology Guidelines](#)



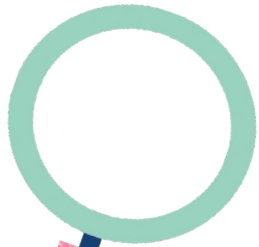
- [Guiding Principles to Prevent Victim Blaming](#)



To practice

Scenario 1

Scenario 6



To practice





Myths and Reality

Myths and Reality



01. No place is immune

02. It's about Rights

03. Boys don't tell

04. No blame, No excuse

05. Closer than you think

06. Not just 'there'

07. When silence and friends feel safer

08. From childhood to adolescence

09. Every child at risk

10. Beyond the "deserving" victim

11. The hidden traps

12. Misunderstanding the impact of trauma

13. Beyond physical contact



1. No place is immune

**rethinking the urban-rural divide in
technology-facilitated child sexual
exploitation and abuse**



1. No place is immune

rethinking the urban-rural divide in technology-facilitated child sexual exploitation and abuse





1. No place is immune



✗ The myth:

“Technology-facilitated child sexual exploitation and abuse is mostly a problem in cities where children have more and better access to the Internet.”



✓ The reality:

Children in rural areas are equally exposed as their urban counterparts to risks of tech-facilitated CSEA. In some cases, factors like lower digital literacy, a lack of services and limited awareness of digital safety make them even more vulnerable.

1. No place is immune



The Facts:

- The urban-rural divide in Internet connectivity is not always as sharp as one might think, even if overall urban children tend to be online more than in rural areas.
- Disparity in vulnerability to tech-facilitated CSEA is surprisingly small. There was little to no difference in 11 of 13 Disrupting Harm countries. In some contexts, rural children were even more frequently victimised.
- Other factors than Internet access affect levels of tech-facilitated CSEA – including digital skills and online safety awareness.



1. No place is immune

What are the implications for girls and boys?

- Governments and other stakeholders tend to prioritise investment in services and other resources to combat tech-facilitated CSEA in urban areas.
- Children in rural areas are left behind in digital skills trainings, prevention strategies and awareness raising campaigns about digital safety.
- Support services for tech-facilitated CSEA tend to be concentrated in urban areas. Frontline workers highlighted this as a crucial shortcoming in both Africa and Asia.

"This phenomenon of online exploitation occurs more in major cities because children there have access to smartphones and the Internet,"

*-representative from the Ministry of Justice,
Constitutional and Religious Affairs of
Mozambique*

In reality, there is *little to no difference* between exposure to tech-facilitated CSEA in rural and urban areas in Mozambique.



Opportunities for change

What can be done?

- **CSOs should...** launch targeted campaigns in rural areas using local languages and culturally relevant materials. This should also include engaging directly with communities.
- **Schools and other educational actors should...** ensure that curricula in both rural and urban areas equip children to better understand digital safety and risks of tech-facilitated CSEA. This should include comprehensive sexuality and relationships education and training in digital skills.
- **Law enforcement should...** ensure that resources to prevent and respond to tech-facilitated CSEA are allocated to both urban and rural areas, that dedicated specialized units are aware of needs of all children, and that prevention efforts are also focused on rural areas.
- **Governments should...** allocate resources for prevention and adequate OCSEA support services – including to frontline workers and help lines – in both rural and urban areas.



Additional resources:

- ECPAT, INTERPOL and UNICEF – Disrupting Harm country reports (various), 2021-2002, available at:
<https://ecpat.org/disrupting-harm/>
- ECPAT, INTERPOL and UNICEF – Disrupting Harm Data Insight 9: The role of caregivers in preventing Online risks and harms for children, 2022, available at:
<https://safeonline.global/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/DH-data-insights-9-151223.pdf>





To practice

Scenario 5





2. It's about Rights

why children need to know about
sexuality and relationships



2. It's about Rights

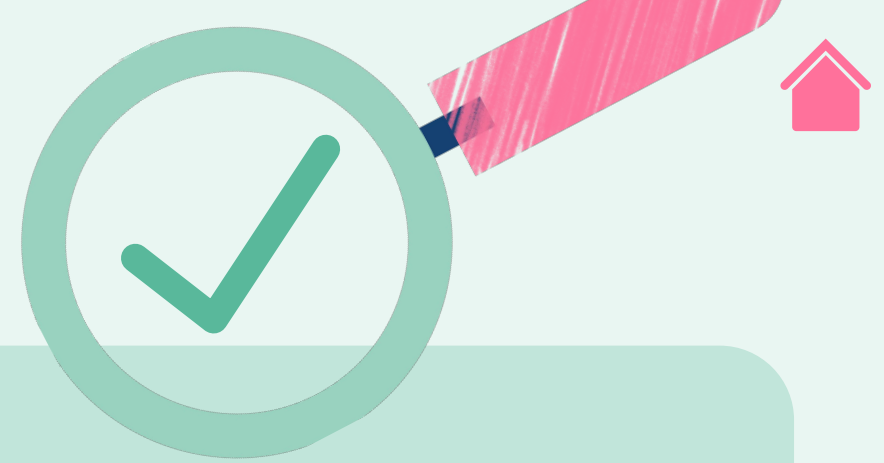
The myth:

“Sex education for children in schools is harmful – it exposes children to ideas they are too young for, and leads to them becoming more sexually active younger.”

The reality:

Comprehensive sexuality and relationships education for children is crucial in schools, including to strengthen awareness and understanding of CSEA, and to recognise and respond to such abuse.

2. It's about Rights



The Facts:

- Children often lack access to quality and comprehensive sexuality and relationships education.
- Where sexuality and relationships education takes place, it mainly targets older children.
- Sexuality and relationships education is often framed in terms of morality, limiting the perception of children and young people as individuals with rights and agency.
- Conservative societal norms and taboos around discussing sexuality often hinder effective education.
- There are huge benefits from comprehensive sexuality and relationships education curricula. Evidence shows it delays initiation of sexual intercourse, leads to more use of contraceptives, and reduces risk taking.



2. It's about Rights

What are the implications for girls and boys?

- Victims often do not understand that they are being victimised, failing to recognise certain behaviours as abusive or exploitative.
- Children may access false, misleading or unhelpful information online.
- The lack of education undermines justice and accountability for CSEA.
- Teachers often lack the training themselves to impart crucial skills.
- Conservative social norms and taboos limit children's access to education about CSEA.

"I tried talking to my mom about sex, she told me she is not having that conversation with me,"

-anonymous survivor

"A number of our children don't know that they are exploited. There are high chances they will not recognise that they are being abused sexually. So that is one of the greatest challenges,"

-a CSO child protection officer in Uganda



Opportunities for change

What can be done?

- **CSOs should...** engage in education programs and trainings with children, caregivers, teachers and those working with children on how to stay safe, setting healthy personal boundaries, understanding consent, recognizing abuse and seeking help and signposting children and adults to trusted information.
- **Schools and other educational actors should...** ensure that curricula include comprehensive age-appropriate sexuality and relationships education, including for younger children. This should include training in digital skills and self-protection from abuse.
- **Law enforcement should...** work with communities and schools to support awareness raising on sexual abuse and exploitation of girls and boys, including online, demonstrating their commitment to combating the issue.
- **Governments should...** allocate resources to train and support teachers to access learnings on these topics and engage children in open discussions about safe relationships, consent and online safety, while supporting schools to systematically include such trainings in curricula.



Additional resources:



- UNESCO, [International technical guidance on sexuality education: an evidence-informed approach](#), 2018



- Council of Europe, [Mechanisms for collective action to prevent and combat online child sexual exploitation and abuse: A comparative review \(Chapter 7: Mechanisms to strengthen education and awareness raising initiatives to prevent OCSEA in member states\)](#), 2019

- ECPAT, [Addressing the need for comprehensive sexuality and relationships education to combat online child sexual exploitation and abuse](#) 2025

- ECPAT, INTERPOL and UNICEF, [Disrupting Harm Data Insight 9: The role of caregivers in preventing Online risks and harms for children](#), 2022



To practice

Scenario 7





3. Boys don't tell

masculinity, harm and silence

3. Boys don't tell



The myth:

“Girls are much more likely to be victims of sexual exploitation and abuse than boys.”

The reality:

Girls and boys are both at risks of sexual exploitation and abuse, and in some contexts, boys are at even higher risks. Harmful gender stereotypes often mean that boys are more hesitant to report crimes.

3. Boys don't tell



The Facts:

- Global research shows that boys are frequently more represented amongst survivors of sexual exploitation and abuse than we previously thought, and in some contexts (like in street situations) they are even at higher risk than girls.
- Across the 13 Disrupting Harm countries, there were no significant differences in the number of victims across gender lines.
- Rigid ideas of masculinity with boys 'needing to be strong' and taboos around discussing sexuality means that boys often refrain from reporting abuse to authorities or caregivers.



3. Boys don't tell

What are the implications for girls and boys?

- Boys are sometimes neglected when it comes to receiving information on risks and suffer from shame that impede help-seeking.
- Services for boys often lack capacity to adjust the specific needs of boys.
- In some countries, anti-homosexuality legislation even means that boys could risk self-incriminating if they report abuse.

"Difficult to seek help because people do not see boys as victims,"

- Male survivor, South Korea

"Women are open to approach various services compared to men. [...] More girls than boys report, boys are a little bit shy. [...] They [girls] will approach different services for assistance, and lately attention on boys is lacking behind as most programmes focus on girls,"

- Frontline worker from Namibia



Opportunities for change

What can be done?

- **Civil society should...** launch attitudes and behaviors change programs to challenge harmful gender stereotypes are affecting victims of CSEA, including boys. Advocate with governments to decriminalise homosexuality and ensuring legal protections are equally applicable to all children.
- **Governments should...** ensure that prevention programmes do not focus only on certain 'stereotypical' victims and include and target boys as well. Ensure that all children who were subjected to CSEA have access to recovery and reintegration services tailored to their specific needs, regardless of gender.
- **Law enforcement should...** ensure that officers are trained in receiving reports of abuse from all victims in a trauma-informed, sensitive and non-discriminatory manner, regardless of their gender or sexual orientation and in a way that promotes healthier forms of masculinity, e.g. promoting and encouraging help-seeking behaviours for boys.



Additional resources:

- ECPAT, [Global Boys Initiative: A global review of existing literature on the sexual exploitation of boys](#), 2021.
- [Global Boys Initiative](#) website.
- [The Global Alliance for the Protection of Boys from Sexual Violence \(GAPB\)](#)



To practice



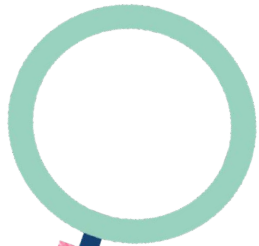
Scenario 3

Scenario 5



Scenario 8

Scenario 11





To practice





4. No blame, No excuse

**confronting blame and shifting
responsibility to perpetrators**



4. No blame, No excuse

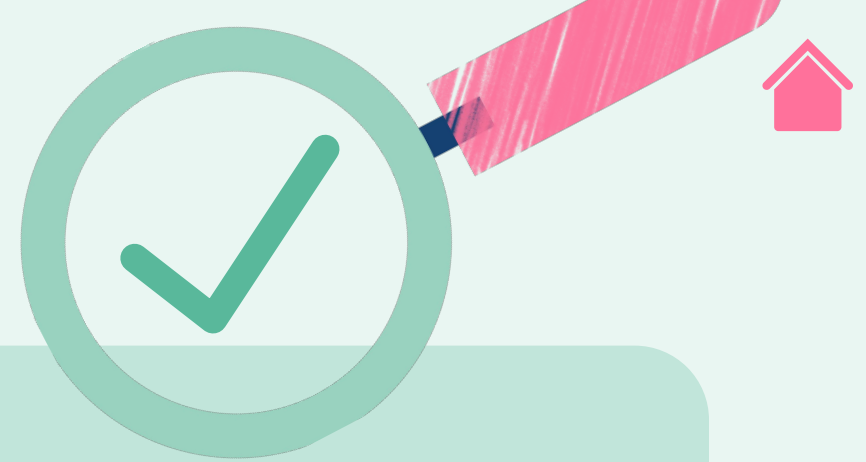
The myth:

"If a child misbehaves, drinks, accepts gifts for sex or shares sexually explicit images of themselves, they are partly responsible for any abuse that follows"

The reality:

Victims of CSEA are *never* to blame for the abuse they are exposed to, even if they have had a degree of agency. Abuse and exploitation only happens because someone takes advantage of a child - it is always the offender's fault.

4. No blame, No excuse



The Facts:

- “Sharing nudes” or “sexting” are increasingly common activities among children and young people.
- Children who have been abused often feel ashamed to report crimes, thinking that they are to blame.
- This is compounded when they face judgemental attitudes – whether by peers, caregivers, law enforcement or other authority figures.
- One-in-three (34%) of survivors surveyed in the Disrupting Harm study did not tell anyone at all about abuse they had face – often because they feared being judged, disbelieved or blamed for what had happened to them.



4. No blame, No excuse

What are the implications for girls and boys?

- Children refrain from reporting abuse, leading to a lack of protection for victims and accountability for crimes.
- Children who are “victim blamed” often suffer additional trauma, on top of the abuse they have already experienced.
- At community level, victims can face stigma or social exclusion.

“He was sad that, I don’t even know why he was sad, but I think he was sad about the wrong thing. I think he was asking me like, ‘Why did you do that?’, when the question should have been like, ‘Why did he do that to you?’,” young survivor from Malaysia on opening up to her father about abuse she faced.

“I was scared, afraid that the police would arrest me.”

-Survivor, Cambodia

“I knew I was wrong, and I made a mistake, so I knew I was here from my own doing.”

-Survivor, Malaysia



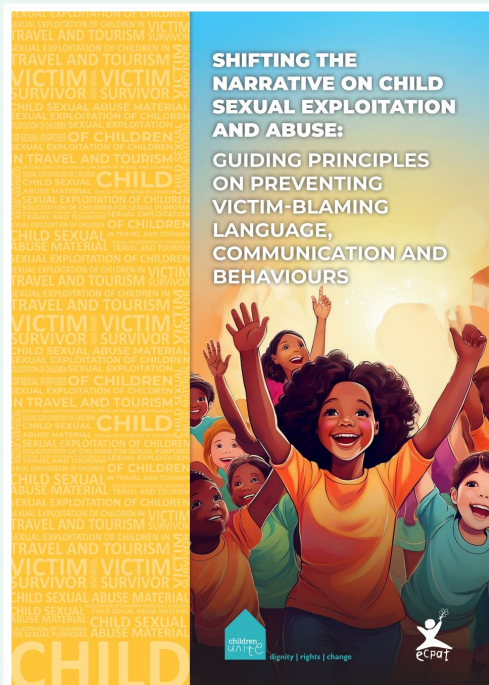
Opportunities for change

What can be done?

- **Law enforcement should...** invest in training for officers in how to respond sensitively, in a trauma-informed manner to both boy and girl survivors of CSEA, including in how social taboos and ingrained gender biases and other stereotypes can negatively affect responses to such crimes.
- **Civil society should...** invest in education and awareness raising campaigns with authorities, communities and children on all forms of child sexual exploitation and abuse, including online and facilitated by technologies.
- **Government should...** ensure justice and accountability by prosecuting offenders, while investing in awareness raising campaigns to challenge victim blaming and social tolerance towards abusers.



Additional resources:



- ECPAT International. (2025). Shifting the narrative on Child Sexual Exploitation and Abuse: guiding principles on preventing victim-blaming language, communication and behaviours.
- THORN (2019). Self-Generated Child Sexual Abuse Material: Attitudes and Experiences, 2019
- Sexual Assault Centre of Edmonton, Victim Blaming,
- ECPAT, INTERPOL and UNICEF, Disrupting Harm Data Insight 2: Children's disclosures of online sexual exploitation and abuse, 2022

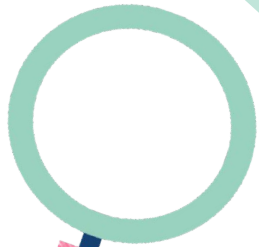


To practice

Scenario 1

Scenario 3

Scenario 6





5. Closer than you think

the reality of known and trusted perpetrator



5. Closer than you think

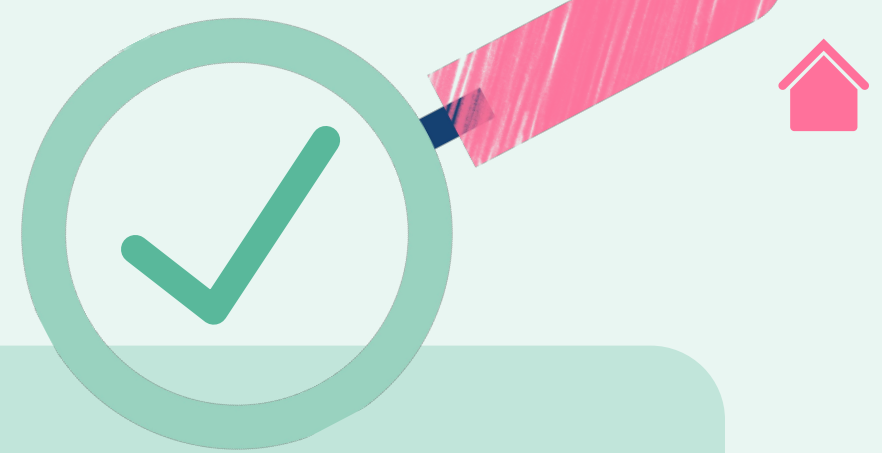
The myth:

“Sexual exploitation and abuse of children, both online and in-person, is mostly perpetrated by strangers, whether on the dark web or ‘on the streets’.”

The reality:

While “stranger danger” does exist, in most countries CSEA – both online and in-person – is actually committed by children’s peers or other individuals in their circle of trust.

5. Closer than you think



The Facts:

- Most children already knew the perpetrator – they were most often preyed on by older friends of people they knew, in 9 of 11 Disrupting Harm countries.
- It is significant that tech-facilitated CSEA can be more often committed by other minors, i.e. a friend or someone the child knows under the age of 18 in some countries.
- According to frontline support workers in seven countries surveyed by ECPAT, the most common relationships between perpetrators and OCSEA victims were parents/step-parents (mostly males), other relatives (aged 18+), and family friends (mostly males).



5. Closer than you think

What are the implications for girls and boys?

- CSEA prevention campaigns and messaging are often focused on protecting children from strangers.
- Frontline social workers, law enforcement and others do not receive the training they need in how to investigate cases of abuse, or how to care for victims.
- Resources for law enforcement are geared towards protecting children from abuse by “strangers”.
- Investment from Global North countries often focused on tracking their own citizens abroad, rather than supporting local law enforcement.

“He sent me money and was always willing to help without asking for anything in return. I felt like he was such a nice guy, and he was a blessing to me.”

-Female survivor, Kenya

“No, I did not, because I was afraid because my mom had warned me not to communicate with people that I do not know on social media, so I was afraid that she will criticise me for doing that. I had to be my own rock ma’am.”

-Survivor, Namibia



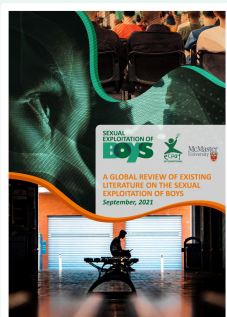
Opportunities for change

What can be done?

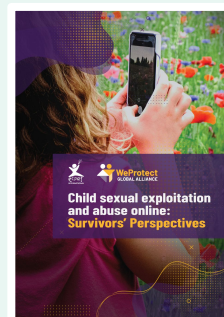
- **Governments should...** design comprehensive CSEA prevention programmes involving multi-agency cooperation, law enforcement, community engagement that are tailored to their national contexts and innovative strategies particularly for online environments
- **Governments and law enforcement should...** ensure that relevant personnel – such as frontline workers and police officers – are trained and equipped to respond to all forms of child sexual abuse, including the blurred lines between online and in-person offending, overcoming cultural and societal barriers, the lack of trust in law enforcement, and rethink their role in secondary prevention for at risk groups.
- **Governments and law enforcement should...** ensure accountability and child-centered and gender-sensitive access to justice. All children who come into contact with the law as alleged offenders should be supported and handled within a separate child justice system in accordance with child-friendly justice principles and procedures.



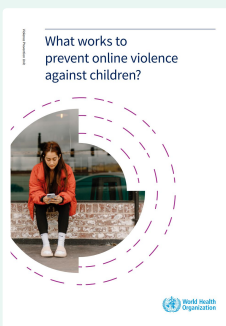
Additional resources:



- ECPAT International, [Global Boys Initiative: A global review of existing literature on the sexual exploitation of boys](#), 2021.



- ECPAT International, [Child sexual exploitation and abuse online: Survivors' Perspectives](#), 2022.



- World Health Organization, [What Works to Prevent Online Violence Against Children?](#), 2022.

- Devries, Karen, et al., [Who Perpetrates Violence Against Children? A systematic analysis of age-specific and sex-specific data](#), 2018, BMJ Paediatrics Open.

To practice



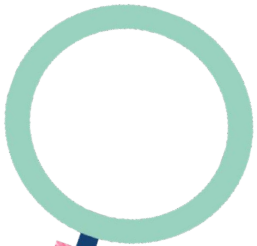
Scenario 1

Scenario 3



Scenario 8

Scenario 9





6. Not just 'there'

the global reality of child sexual
exploitation and abuse

6. Not just 'there'

The myth:

“Sexual exploitation and abuse only really affect children in “hotspots” like Thailand or the Philippines.”

The reality:

CSEA is a global phenomenon, affecting boys and girls everywhere – regardless of age, location, social status or ethnicity.





6. Not just 'there'

The Facts:

- More than 370 million women and girls alive today – or one in eight – experienced rape or sexual assault before they turned 18, according to UNICEF.
- When “non-contact” forms of sexual violence, such as online or verbal abuse are included, the number of girls and women affected rises to 650 million globally – or one in five.
- An estimated 240 to 310 million boys and men – or around one in 11 – have experienced rape or sexual assault during childhood.
- ECPAT's own Disrupting Harm research reveal similarly high levels of OCSEA. Up to 20% of children had been affected in the 12 countries surveyed.



6. Not just 'there'

What are the implications for girls and boys?

- Resources to combat CSEA tend to be concentrated in areas traditionally considered "hotspots", leaving children unprotected in other areas
- Non-contact forms of CSEA – such as technology facilitated abuse – is often deprioritised or not considered as "serious" as other forms of abuse
- This also ties into a misunderstanding of who perpetrators are – they are often not strangers, but come from within a child's circle of trust

Opportunities for change

What can be done?

- **Governments should...** invest in equipping and training police officers, prosecutors, judges/magistrates, lawyers, courtroom staff, statutory social workers, and frontline social workers more systematically as part of ongoing professional development.
- **Civil society should...** design and launch campaigns about the prevalence of CSEA tailored to their specific national contexts.
- **International actors should...** strengthen collaboration with a focus on supporting comprehensive prevention efforts and not just addressing certain citizens



Additional resources:

- UNICEF, [*Data Brief: Sexual violence*](#), October 2024.
- ECPAT, INTERPOL and UNICEF, [*Children's experiences of online sexual exploitation and abuse in 12 countries in Eastern and Southern Africa and Southeast Asia*](#), 2022.

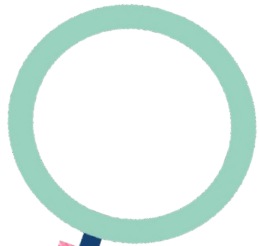




To practice

Scenario 10


Scenario 11





7. When silence and friends feel safer or how systems fail to protect children

7. When silence and friends feel safer



✗ The myth:

“Child victims of sexual exploitation and abuse generally report what happened to them to someone in authority, whether it’s the police or a caregiver.”



✓ The reality:

Child victims mostly tell a friend or a sibling rather than a caregiver about sexual exploitation they’ve been subjected to, and very rarely report crimes to the police as a first resort. Often, child victims tell no one at all.



7. When silence and friends feel safer

The Facts:

- Victims surveyed in the Disrupting Harm study rarely told someone in authority about what had happened to them at a first instance. Most children told a friend (40%) or a sibling (24%), rather than female (21%) or male (19%) caregivers.
- Very few children told a helpline (3%), police (3%) or a social worker (3%). Many children (33%) did not tell anyone at all about the abuse they had been subjected to, perhaps reflecting a lack of trust in authorities.
- Many children said they feared being doubted, disbelieved or even blamed for the abuse, while others said they felt ashamed of what happened to them – often due to conservative social norms.



7. When silence and friends feel safer

What are the implications for girls and boys?

- Survivors often carry the trauma of sexual violence into adulthood without proper support.
- Peers who receive disclosure often do not know what to do and face stress
- Evidence shows that the impact is further compounded when children delay disclosing their experiences, sometimes for long periods, or keep the abuse secret altogether.
- Lack of reporting translates into lack of access to justice for child victims. This impunity fuels further abuse, allowing perpetrators to walk free.

"She told me I needed to tell my mother, a grown up, because she was also young and that she could try to help but a grown up is better. She told me I had to tell my mother and I said, 'No, my mother will kill me.' She told me that my mother can't kill me because I am her daughter... that man is to blame and she is my mother and she loves me, and she convinced me to try and talk to my mum or my older sister, but I told her never to speak about it. But she said that she won't promise not to tell anyone... That she might tell her mum, so that I can find help, because I was in a really bad state. So, she told the teacher who was her mother."

-Survivor from Kenya



QUOTES:



"No one, that was my own little skeleton [laughing]. I put it back into the closet until I was ready to deal with it one day. But then, when I found out that my friend was involved in it as well, then I told her also what had happened to me and then she felt really comfortable. She told me how it's making her feel without the fear of being judged. So, my friend was the only one I told and we kind of gave each other support."

-Survivor from Namibia

"No, I did not, because I was afraid because my mom had warned me not to communicate with people that I do not know on social media, so I was afraid that she will criticise me for doing that. I had to be my own rock ma'am."

-Survivor from Namibia



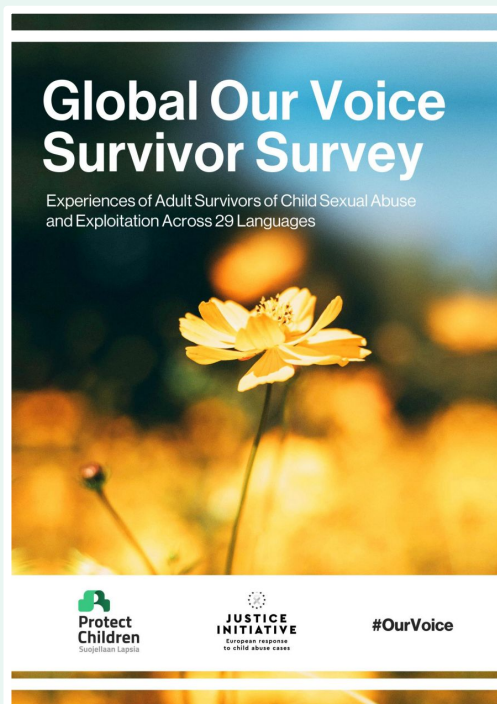
Opportunities for change

What can be done?

- **Governments should...** design comprehensive CSEA prevention and education programmes to inform children of their rights and the reporting and help-seeking mechanisms available for them and their peers. These should be child-centered and accessible to all children and design WITH children
- **Governments and law enforcement should...** focus on building trusted services that children feel comfortable approaching. Ensure that all workers in contact with children, including police officers – are trained to create safe environments and to all forms of child sexual abuse including online, and are able to provide adequate support to victims and their family members, without judgment or blame.
- **Governments and law enforcement should...** ensure accountability mechanisms and systematic inclusion of children in service quality assessments and improvement plans including child-centered and gender-sensitive access to justice.



Additional resources:




- Protect Children, *Experiences of Adult Survivors of Child Sexual Abuse and Exploitation Across 29 Languages*, 2024.
- ECPAT, INTERPOL and UNICEF, *Disrupting Harm Data Insight 2: Children's disclosures of online sexual exploitation and abuse*, 2022.



8. From childhood to adolescence

teenagers as overlooked victims

8. From childhood to adolescence



✗ The myth:

“CSEA mostly affects younger children and is not such a big issue for teenagers or adolescents.”



✓ The reality:

CSEA affects children of all ages. In fact, in some countries and context, older children (14-17-year-olds) are more vulnerable to sexual abuse and exploitation.



8. From childhood to adolescence



The Facts:

- While the Disrupting Harm study didn't survey children younger than 12, overall, it showed that more 15-17-year-olds had been subjected to OCSEA than 12-14-year-olds (although this varied between countries).
- ECPAT also surveyed frontline support workers in Hungary and South Korea, who said that 52% and 32% respectively of male victims were 10 years old or younger, and 51% and 24% of female.
- Similarly, a major survey by Childlight of victims in 16 global countries, showed that around half of all victims (53% of girls and 47% of boys) had first been abused when they were 14 or older.



8. From childhood to adolescence

What are the implications for girls and boys?

- Government resources (policing and social support services) are often geared towards younger victims.
- Social workers and law enforcement officers often lack the training required to sensitively handle cases involved older children.
- Awareness raising and education campaigns are often geared towards younger children, neglecting the specific needs of potential older victims.

"I think the client is wrong, then the person who brings you there. Firstly, the client who has money and told [the broker] to find younger children, 16 years old. So, the victim is the child. Normally the child thinks only about getting money. Like me, I went through this. They don't think of anything. Nowadays, children have a phone, so it is easy to be contacted... So, the clients commit the biggest mistake, they have the money. Some people care too much about money like [the broker], so he has a lot of techniques to find girls for the clients."

-Survivor from Cambodia



Opportunities for change

What can be done?

- **Governments should** carefully allocate resources to law enforcement, social services and other actors to protect all girls and boys under the age of 18, and considering the specificities of child development, evolving capacities, risks and contexts of sexual exploitation
- **Governments and law enforcement should** ensure law enforcement and other professionals in contact with children are fully trained and equipped to identify and protect child victims of sexual exploitation, regardless of their age, gender, diverse contexts of exploitation, relations to the offender, etc
- **Civil society** should work with schools and other actors to develop awareness raising campaigns and digital trainings that fill the gaps in understanding diverse forms of child sexual exploitation and manifestations across different age groups and contexts and ensure preventive and protective responses that do not blame children directly or indirectly and do not imply children are responsible for their own protection.



Additional resources:

- Childlight, Understanding the nature of CSEA from Violence against Children and Youth Surveys, 2023, available at:
<https://www.childlight.org/understanding-nature-c-sea-violence-against-children-surveys>
- Internet Watch Foundation, Annual Report 2023, available at:
<https://www.iwf.org.uk/annual-report-2023/>



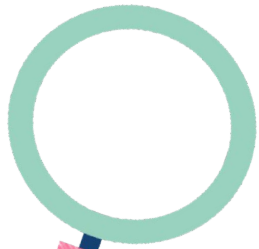


To practice

Scenario 1

Scenario 2

Scenario 6





9. Every child at risk

rethinking how child sexual exploitation
can affect every child



9. Every child at risk



✗ The myth:

“Only certain children, from poor families, broken homes, or with anti-social behaviours, are at risk of being sexually exploited .”



✓ The reality:

Any child can be sexually exploited, and this is exacerbated by technology. Certain children of different identities, characteristics, or experiences, are at higher risk of sexual violence. There is also a correlation between other forms of adverse childhood experiences and sexual exploitation. In-person violence is also inter-connected with tech-facilitated CSEA.

9. Every child at risk



The Facts:

- Survivors often identify adverse childhood experiences as catalysts for experiencing CSEA. These include, for example, family dynamics such as early separation of parents, or other disruptive events.
- Overlapping identities, characteristics and experiences may increase a child's vulnerability to harm. So children from minorities, children of different sexual identities or gender orientations, children with disabilities, or in living in humanitarian contexts or care homes may be more at risk.
- Different sexual and gender identities can also be a contributing factor, in particular if stigma contributes to a sense of isolation or risk-taking behaviour, but also if homosexuality is criminalized, preventing help seeking.
- Research strongly indicates that in-person sexual violence puts children at far higher risk of also experiencing tech-facilitated CSEA.
- A lack of understanding of sexuality was a contributor, highlighting the need for comprehensive sexuality and relationships education.



9. Every child at risk

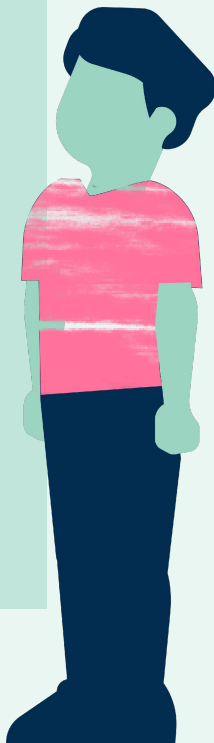
What are the implications for girls and boys?

- Age, gender, disability, ethnicity and other forms of discrimination or marginalisation may impact on the risks of child sexual exploitation and need to be considered when designing prevention interventions.
- Children get caught in a vicious cycle of abuse, so prevention interventions should combine all forms of violence against children and targeted sexual violence approaches.
- Prevention also need to reach ALL children.
- The impacts of tech-facilitated sexual violence should be taken into account in the overall child protection response and should not be viewed as separate.

One young Colombian man who identifies himself as gay said that the feeling of loneliness led him into risky situations. He was manipulated by older men and got involved in relationships that he could not identify as abusive due to the need to reaffirm his sexual orientation.

"Okay, I guess, uhh, everything started when I was a bit younger. I was, I can say, I was molested by my own brother, older brother. Later-on in my life, I think I was 14 to 15, I was raped by a boyfriend and then a few months later I was then raped by a friend."

-Young survivor from Namibia

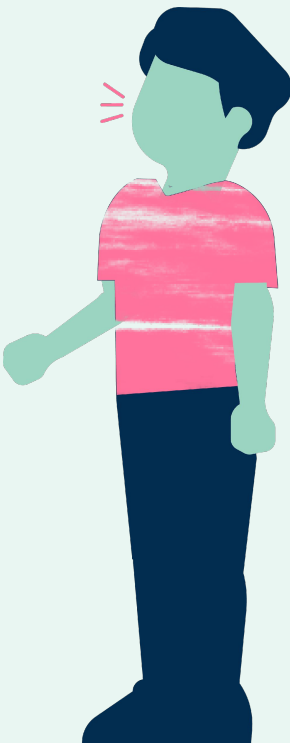


QUOTES:



"In reference to Dad, was an incident where my uncle, [...], money was lost on his way back to [City]. They lost it while on the road and was afraid that it might have been at our home where they slept the night. At that time, I don't remember how old I was, maybe five or seven years old. I didn't take the money but they accused me of taking it. I was beaten and showered with hot water on my feet. While my mother threw hot water on my feet, Dad hit me with a rubber pipe and I was forced to admit that I took the money even though I didn't – my sister did. I remember that incident vividly and have never told my sister up to this day. I have been keeping this to myself for a long time now, I can't tell them the truth up to today."

-Survivor from Malaysia



Opportunities for change

What can be done?

- **Governments, civil society and other stakeholders should...** invest in prevention strategies that address systemic drivers of sexual exploitation, recognize the intersectional vulnerabilities of children and the linkages between various forms of violence against children, gender-based violence and sexual exploitation of children, as well as the intersect between in-person sexual violence and online .
- **Law enforcement should...** be aware and trained to identify all risks and signs of sexual exploitation in connection to other forms of violence children may suffer taking the online dimensions into account and exploring risks of sexual exploitation when children may be in contact with the law

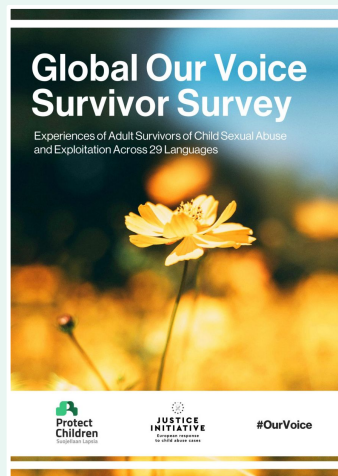
Opportunities for change

What can be done?

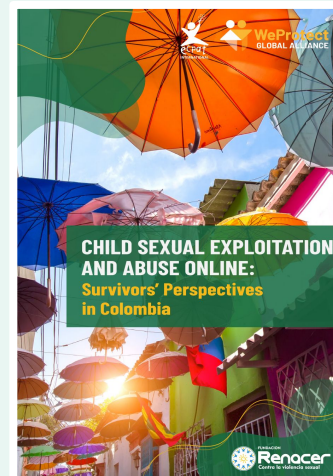
- **Social services, law enforcement and other stakeholder should...** take technology-facilitated sexual violence into account in the overall child protection response. This must be supported by stronger and up-to-date evidence to better understand these links. It is important to remember that child victims often don't disclose sexual abuse or sexual exploitation until they feel safe and trusted so every service and person in contact with children should be trained and equipped to create such conditions.
- **Overall,** interventions should combine all prevention levels targeting all children and other more 'at risk' children, focus on all forms of violence against children as well as specifically sexual exploitation, dispel common misconceptions about child sexual abuse and exploitation, including the misconception that online abuse is not a serious form of abuse.



Additional resources:



- Protect Children, *Experiences of Adult Survivors of Child Sexual Abuse and Exploitation Across 29 Languages*, 2024, available at: <https://www.suojellaanlapsia.fi/en/post/our-voice-global-report>



- ECPAT International and Fundación Renacer, *Child Sexual Exploitation and Abuse Online: Survivors' Perspectives in Colombia*, 2021, available at: https://ecpat.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/30-11-2021_Colombia_National-Report_EN_FINAL.pdf

- ECPAT, INTERPOL and UNICEF, *Disrupting Harm Data Insight 6: The relationship between online and in-person child sexual exploitation and abuse*, 2022, available at: <https://safeonline.global/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/Disrupting-Harm-Data-Insight-6-Online-In-person-Violence-1.pdf>



10. Beyond the “deserving” victim

overcoming bias in recognizing child sexual
exploitation

10. Beyond the “deserving” victim

✗ The myth:

“Some children put themselves in harmful situations through risky behaviours and inappropriate attitudes- they can’t be protected.”

✓ The reality:

There is no hierarchy among victims – *all child survivors have the same right to protection*. But too often, biased language or victim blaming negatively impacts how some children are treated by social services, law enforcement and others.

10. Beyond the “deserving” victim



The Facts:

- There is no such thing as a ‘more deserving’ child victim. All child survivors have the same right to protection, care and access to justice and reparations, whatever they have done.
- In practice, biases around some more ‘deserving’ victim has led to a “hierarchy of victims”. The “ideal child victim” is often portrayed as a poor “vulnerable” girl that is powerless and waiting for a saviour to rescue her from sexual abuse and exploitation.
- Children who are perceived to have anti-social behaviors, such as run aways, homeless or drug addicts, are often considered less deserving of protection. In cases where the victimization may be driven by needs, perceived loyalty or attachment to the perpetrator, these cases are less likely to be recognised as abusive, and the child victims may be wrongly perceived as ‘making life choices’. This leaves too many victims unprotected and uncared for.



10. Beyond the “deserving” victim

What are the implications for girls and boys?

- Harmful and discriminatory views and notions about who is a “victim” and who is perceived to be ‘consenting’ or behaving anti-socially affects significantly girls and boys’ access to justice, protection, care and reparations.
- Survivors often fear to be disbelieved or blamed for abuse and are hesitant to disclose abuse or seek help.
- Resources and prevention strategies are dedicated to victims seen as more “deserving”, often neglecting other children in extremely vulnerable situations.

“The police said it was late, and why we were not at home. I explained to them what happened. Then they said, ‘Why did you go out at night?’ They seemed to want to blame me for what had happened.”

-Female survivor, Thailand



QUOTES:



"The police did not do their duties. I was really hurt when I went and reported my case to them, and they did not help me. They did not take action. I felt bad. [...] When I told them my problem, they were blaming me, asking me why I would do such a thing and why I would do such a thing and why I behaved like that."

-Female survivor, Uganda

"It also took me to the point where I started doing drugs and the drugs were actually just to numb the reality of what I am fighting so then, when I would use the drugs, I would not feel the need to go out and I wouldn't feel that lonely or anything at all. I lost friends. I lost a lot of things that were meaningful for me at that time, and it wasn't nice."

-Survivor, Namibia



Opportunities for change

What can be done?

- **Law enforcement should...** invest in training for officers in how to identify and respond sensitively to both boy and girl victims of CSEA, including in how social taboos and ingrained gender and societal biases can negatively affect identification and responses to such crimes. Understanding perpetrators strategies and manipulation techniques and the impact of trauma on victims is essential for appropriate responses. Training need to be evidenced-base and move away from stereotypical victim profiles.
- **Government and civil society should...** invest in campaigns with authorities and the general public that focus on perpetrators and offending strategies, and how all children without any exception have the same rights to protection, care, support and justice. Campaigns need to focus on challenging harmful societal attitudes while cultivating a culture of zero tolerance to violence against children and ending impunity of offenders.



Additional resources:

- Alderson, K and Ireland, CA (2020) *Child Sexual Exploitation: Definition and the importance of language. Abuse, An International Impact Journal*, 1 (1), available at: <https://researchonline.ljmu.ac.uk/id/eprint/15703/>
- UK Independent Inquiry on Child Sexual Abuse, E3: *Blaming child victims*, 2022. Available at: <https://www.iicsa.org.uk/reports-recommendations/publications/investigation/cs-organised-networks/part-e-recognising-child-victim/e3-blaming-child-victims.html>



To practice



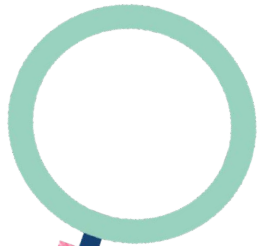
Scenario 1

Scenario 2



Scenario 4

Scenario 6





11. The hidden traps

complex tactics of manipulation
and control by perpetrators

11. The hidden traps



The myth:

"If a child consented to sexual activities with someone, even if this person influenced or manipulated them, its not sexual exploitation"

The reality:

Grooming – or the process of building trust and emotional connection with a child to prepare for abuse - is widespread, both in-person and online, against children of all ages. It involves insistence, manipulation, persuasion, coercion and threats, sometimes in a way that the child is unaware they are being abused.

11. The hidden traps



The Facts:

- Grooming can happen online and in-person. It is a process. It can also be extremely rapid, and happen within few minutes.
- It often begins with building trust, psychological manipulation to isolate the victim, make them doubt of their own perceptions, and abuse children by taking advantage of any vulnerabilities. This manipulation often leave child victims feeling powerless to seek help.
- Perpetrators use a continuum of tactics—including insistence, persuasion, coercion, threats, promises, and luring—all with the explicit goal of abusing the child
- Survivors described different patterns, including perpetrators flattering the child, making 'friendly' connections, pretending to offer work opportunities or other perks.
- Most commonly, perpetrators seek to build up trust with victims before, often abruptly, turning the conversation onto sexual topics.



11. The hidden traps

What are the implications for girls and boys?

- Grooming is poorly understood, and because it is not always a “one-off” event but rather a process, it can be difficult to identify for authorities and / or caregivers.
- Boys and girls are often not equipped to recognize these grooming processes and often self-blame for what happened to them
- There is a huge legal gap when it comes to protecting children from grooming, in particular online.

“Okay. At the beginning, we met online like that on Vimeochat... After that, he spoke to me to calm me, he said he liked me and stuff like that, and we changed the app we both played on, because on Vimeochat, you can't send photo or send other things... So we changed to Viber.”

-Survivor from Cambodia

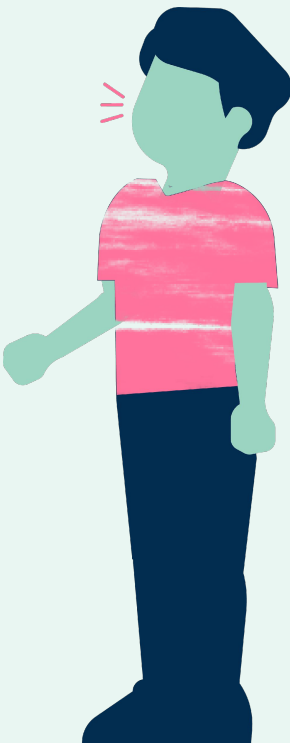


QUOTES:



"I think most of us youths, we don't know a person. We believe in social media. There are strangers there where you post a picture a guy likes it and you don't really know them, and when they comment good things on your picture, you think he is the one and so you jump fast to a conclusion and think this guy loves me, even though they are a total stranger to you, you think they are good and, as time goes by, you are not sure of their intentions with you or their thoughts."

-Survivor from Kenya



Opportunities for change

What can be done?

- **Governments should...** fund public campaigns to educate on the nuances and complexities of grooming, and on the risks and interconnections between online and in-person sexual exploitation and abuse based on evidence in their country, including focused on the circles of trust of children.
- **Governments should...** ensure all professionals in contact with children receive trainings through initial education and ongoing professional development and are capable of recognizing and understanding manipulation and grooming, to better prevent and protect children
- **Civil society should...** work with schools and teachers, caregivers and children to increase understanding of grooming processes, both online and in-person, and common techniques used by perpetrators.



Additional resources:

- ECPAT, *Survivors' Voices Briefing: Perpetrators*, 2022, [AVAILABLE PUBLICLY?]
- ECPAT, INTERPOL and UNICEF, *Disrupting Harm Data Insight 4: Legislation addressing online child sexual exploitation and abuse*, 2022, available at: <https://safeonline.global/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/Disrupting-Harm-Data-Insight-4-Legislation-addressing-OCSEA.pdf>



To practice



Scenario 1

Scenario 2

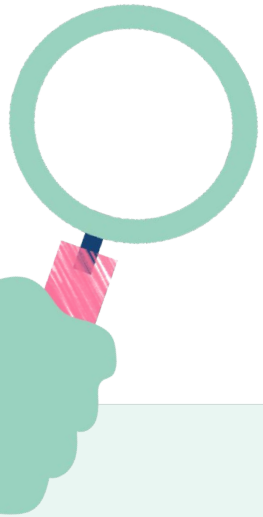
Scenario 4

Scenario 6

Scenario 9

Scenario 10

Scenario 11





12. **Misunderstanding the impact of trauma** and how this impacts disclosure

12. Misunderstanding the impact of trauma



✗ The myth:

“If a child claims abuse but doesn’t report it – or even stays in touch with the ‘abuser’ – it raises serious question about their credibility.”



✓ The reality:

Victims often need time to disclose abuse, for many reasons – this includes how trauma impacts our brain, some do not feel comfortable discussing what happened until they are adults. Similarly, grooming is a complicated process, and it is not always that the child is even aware that they are abused until later.



12. Misunderstanding the impact of trauma



The Facts:

- Many survivors who spoke with ECPAT needed time to process what they had been through – many waited several years, sometimes into adulthood before disclosing the abuse.
- When children stay in touch with the abuser or do not 'run away' and report, it can be mistakenly perceived as consenting
- In a major global survey by Protect Children of more than 22,000 adult victims of CSEA, only one-quarter had reported the abuse within a year after it happened. More than 20% waited between 11 and 20 years, and 25% more than 20 years.
- Statutes of limitations can complicate judicial processes in such cases, as the crime is no longer prosecutable after a prescribed period.



12. Misunderstanding the impact of trauma

What are the implications for girls and boys?

- Victims who disclose what happened to them a period after the abuse took place often face suspicion or disbelief.
- Many adult victims of CSEA struggle to access justice due to difficulties to collect evidence or statutes of limitation.
- Research has shown the long-lasting trauma that victims of CSEA suffer from, even into adulthood.

"They did not provide us with the help we needed, we told them what was happening and they asked us 'how long ago was it?' "... well, this was something that happened many years ago, since I was 5, and by then I was 16, which is why they told us that they could no longer do anything, that it was no longer a crime because it had already been a long time..."

-Female survivor, Mexico



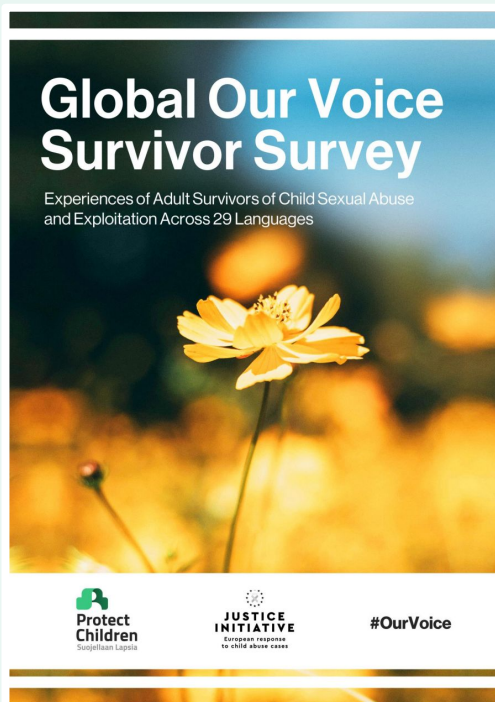
Opportunities for change

What can be done?

- **Governments should...** remove statutes of limitations in national legal frameworks to ensure that victims are able to report crimes and seek justice for past abuse when they are ready.
- **Law enforcement, social services and other stakeholders should...** be equipped with the knowledge and skills to understand how trauma impact the brain and behaviours of victims, how to treat all CSEA victims in a non-discriminatory manner, including by raising awareness of the difficulty of disclosing abuse and seeking help.



Additional resources:



- Protect Children, *Experiences of Adult Survivors of Child Sexual Abuse and Exploitation Across 29 Languages*, 2024, available at: <https://www.suojellaanlapsia.fi/en/post/our-voice-global-report>

- WeProtect, ECPAT: Child sexual exploitation and abuse online: Survivors' Perspectives:
- <http://ecpat.org/survivors-perspectives/>
- <https://www.weprotect.org/survivors-perspectives/>



To practice

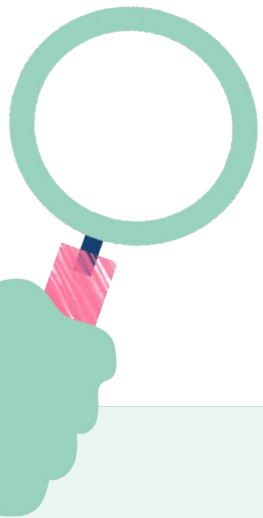
Scenario 1

Scenario 2

Scenario 3

Scenario 5

Scenario 8






13. Beyond physical contact

**the invisible harm of technology-facilitated
child sexual exploitation and abuse**

13. Beyond physical contact



✗ The myth:

“Sexual exploitation online is not harmful if there is no physical contact or injury perpetrated on the child.”



✓ The reality:

The consequences of technology-facilitated child sexual exploitation and abuse can be just as harmful as in-person abuse. Victims often experience lasting trauma, and there is also often a continuum between online and in-person abuse.



13. Beyond physical contact



The Facts:

- Survivors of technology-facilitated SEA told ECPAT that they experience trauma, feelings of shame or other adverse mental health effects in cases of in-person as well as online abuse
- There is a continuum between in-person and technology-facilitated sexual SEA, with children experiencing one form of abuse often more vulnerable to another.
- Technology-facilitated SEA is highly prevalent. In the Disrupting Harm survey, up to 20% of children said they had experienced it.
- The perceived permanency and global reach of technologies adds stress, anxiety and shame for child victims who lack control on how the materials are shared and who may see them



13. Beyond physical contact

What are the implications for girls and boys?

- Victims who try to report tech-facilitated CSEA sometimes face the attitude that what happened to them wasn't "that serious" since it didn't involve physical contact.
- Law enforcement often lack dedicated units or other specialist knowledge to tackle technology-facilitated CSEA.
- Because of a lack of investment or a lack of understanding of the seriousness of the problem, children lack digital skills to identify risks and know where to seek support

"A pimp chats to a client through Telegram, but to ask the girls, they use Facebook."

-Female survivor, Cambodia



QUOTES:

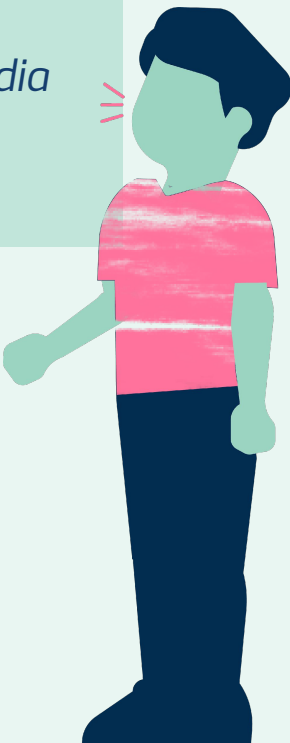


"Knowing about cybercrimes - that would have made me stop a bit, and I would have realised that what was happening to me was that I was the victim of a crime."

-Male survivor, Colombia

"Yes. I was worried, worried. I was afraid they would take those photos to upload and share, share them with others to look at."

-Survivor from Cambodia



Opportunities for change

What can be done?

- **Law enforcement, social services and other stakeholders should...** invest in training for staff to better understand the effects of technology-facilitated SEA on children, and how to better identify and respond to victims in a non-judgemental and compassionate way, understanding the specific implications of technology and impact on victims.
- **Civil society should...** invest in research to better understand the linkages between in-person and technology-facilitated CSEA.
- **Government should...** regulate tech companies to ensure they take rapid and appropriate measures to proactively identify risks, prevent and disrupt offending and block, report and take down CSAM materials.



Additional resources:

- UNICEF Office of Research – Innocenti (2022). *The Relationship Between Online and In-person Child Sexual Exploitation and Abuse. Disrupting Harm Data Insight 6. Global Partnership to End Violence Against Children.*





To practice

Scenario 1

Scenario 4

Scenario 5

Scenario 9

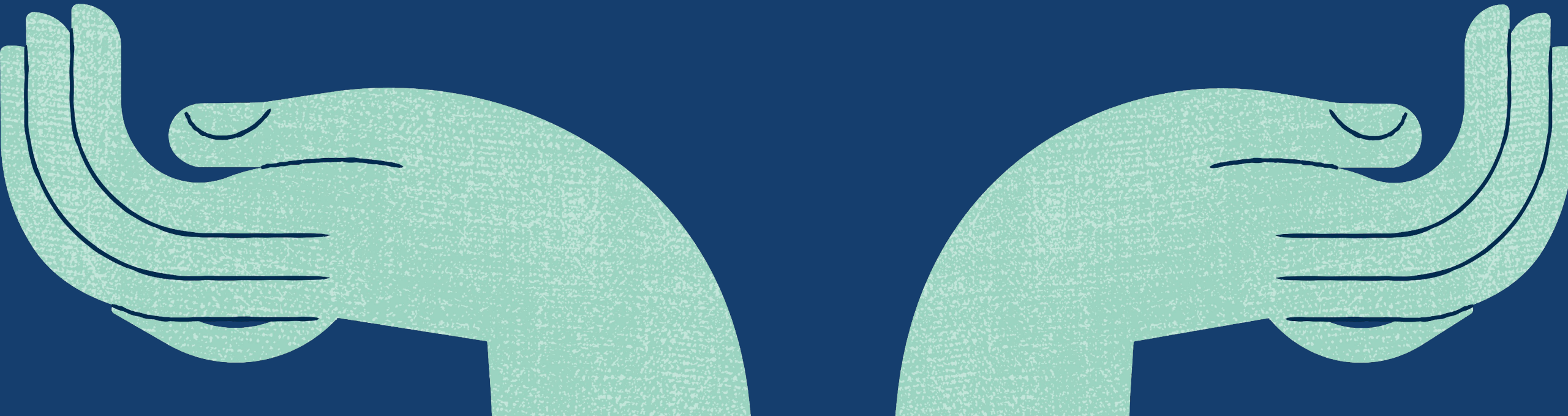
Scenario 10

Scenario 11





Overall opportunities to refine our programming to protect children





Overall opportunities to refine our programming to protect children

- Use **programming, communications, advocacy work to challenge myths** and integrate evidence, adapt to include girls and boys, and different age groups.
- Depict victims in ways that are **representative, truthful and show the complexities**; don't limit to stereotypes of perfect victims "waiting to be rescued". Integrate the multiplicity of contexts and vulnerabilities including online dimensions, nuances, and manipulation techniques of perpetrators. Never blame the victim or imply the child is responsible for their own safety.
- Rethink **access to services** – how can they be tailored to the needs of different children (boys and girls) by integrating their perspectives; how are these services accessible, how do they respond to children's individual needs, how do children know about them?



Overall opportunities to refine our programming to protect children

- Be inclusive when working with communities – select representative trainers, liaisons and facilitators. Think about how **we can maximise reach and challenge harmful notions**, while engaging with the complexities and nuances of our issues
- **Think outside the box on whom to engage** and how we engage with them – i.e., what can Tech, private sector, faith-based leaders, law enforcement learn from our what children and survivors share?
- Engage WITH children and not just FOR them
- **Ensure** adults receiving disclosure, from caregivers, teachers, social support services, law enforcement, are **adequately and regularly trained and equipped with knowledge and skills to** prevent blaming the child victim for whatever choices they have made or for who they are. Listen and Protect.

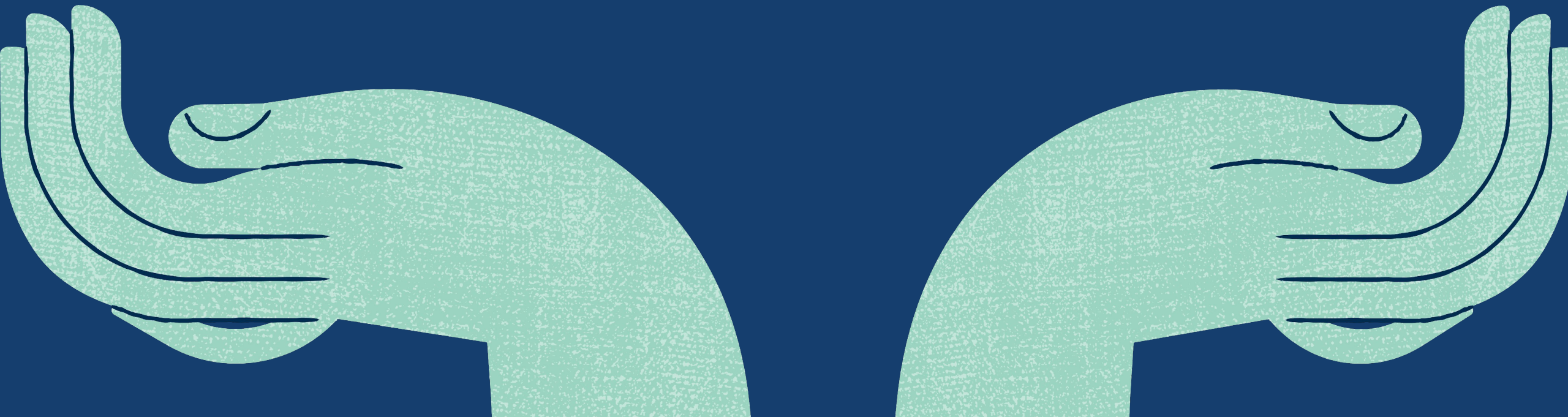


Overall opportunities to refine our programming to protect children

- **Advocate** for resources to better understand the overlap between online and in-person abuse in response and prevention.
- **Help people and peers in the community to provide support** and facilitate formal disclosure and reporting through trainings on reporting processes, and how to listen and support children disclosing abuse.
- **Conduct nation-wide campaigns**, including rural areas, on online and in-person CSEA, for girls and boys and focusing on the various perpetrators tactics and profiles, including the circle of trust of children, from families to peers and romantic partners.



Overall opportunities for law enforcement





Overall opportunities for law enforcement

- Invest in trainings on child-centered approaches, understanding how trauma impacts child victims, debunk myths and misconceptions. Ensure training are 'nuanced' with various victims' profiles, offenders' profiles, etc – specific attention to victim-blaming attitudes.
- Include trainings in national police curricula and ongoing professional development, including for non-specialist units.
- Participate in prevention efforts – this demonstrates to society that CSEA is an important issue that can't be tolerated and that they are committed.



Scenarios:

Challenging our perceptions of sexual exploitation and abuse of children

The following scenarios explore how these myths play out in practice, and have a very real effect on the lives of boys and girls. Listen to the scenarios and discuss how harmful notions – our own and others' - affect how we see the sexual exploitation and abuse of children

<https://forms.office.com/r/RCA6mdbgqu>



Scenarios



01. Sexual exploitation among peers

02. From consent to sexual exploitation, threats and fear of reporting

03. Unrecognized victims when boys are sexually exploited

04. From aspiration to exploitation- the coercive realities behind online

05. When child victims have nowhere to turn

06. A child victim blamed is a perpetrator protected

07. Knowledge is power – when knowledge is accurate

08. Silencing of survivors and truth denied

09. Anyone, anywhere - child victim without knowing

10. No child - no harm the dangerous myth behind AI-generated child sexual abuse material (CSAM)

11. 'It looks real' – the harm behind AI manipulated CSAM



Scenario 1

Sexual exploitation
among peers

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Scenario 1:

Sexual exploitation among peers

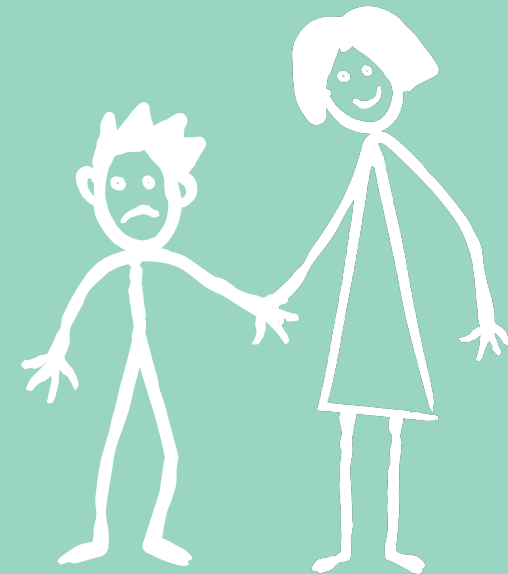
Scenario 1:

Sexual exploitation among peers



16-year-old Jasmin has been dating her boyfriend Jose, who is the same age, for a few weeks. They text each other all the time, and one night Jose asks Jasmin to send him naked “selfies” of herself. She hesitates at first, but she trusts and loves Jose – and besides, he has offered to do the same.

A few days later, Jasmin is shocked to wake up and see that Jose has shared her pictures in a chat group with some of their school friends. She feels depressed and ashamed and blames herself for sharing the pictures. She does not tell anyone about what has happened.



QUESTIONS



Strongly
disagree



Disagree



No opinion



Agree



Strongly
agree



Q1: This happened within a consensual relationship so this should not be considered sexual exploitation.



Q2: Considering that she was the one sharing pictures Jasmin should be ashamed to report the case to the police.



Q3: It is only sharing a few images it's no big deal.



QUESTIONS



Strongly disagree

Disagree

No opinion

Agree

Strongly agree



Q4: Sharing these types of images is very normal among teens Jose has nothing to worry about.



Q5: Both share some blame – Jose for passing on the pictures without consent but also Jasmin for sharing them in the first place.



Explainer

- Creating, sharing, and resharing self-generated sexual content has become increasingly common, and "sharing nudes" or "sexting" is often normalised among young people. As adults, this is something we must try to understand better, and realise that the consensual sharing of such images is not necessarily a crime (in most countries). What is illegal, however, is to share such photos or videos more widely, or to obtain them through deception or coercion. This amounts to child sexual exploitation and abuse. It is important to keep this in mind and to never resort to "victim blaming", even if a child had some agency in creating explicit material of themselves in the first place.



Explainer

- Children who have been subjected to sexual exploitation and abuse are often overcome with feelings of shame and self-blame, and it can be difficult to know what to do in such a traumatic situation. While it is easy to say that Jasmin might have told a trusted person – whether an adult or a peer – about what happened, in practice survivors do not always feel comfortable to do so – in particular if they fear being dismissed, doubted or even blamed for the abuse. It is up to us to create an environment where victims and survivors feel comfortable and safe disclosing violations, whether it is to peers, parents, law enforcement or social services.



Explainer

- These actors – police, judicial staff, social workers - have a duty to treat Jasmin with compassion, respect and in a non-discriminatory manner, and to investigate and act on any sexual crimes against children. This could include official orders to the websites to remove the sexual content of Jasmin and consequences (such as rehabilitation, therapeutic support or criminal charges, depending on the age and circumstances of those involved) for Jose who committed the crime.



Scenario 2

From consent to sexual
exploitation, threats and
fear of reporting

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Scenario 2:

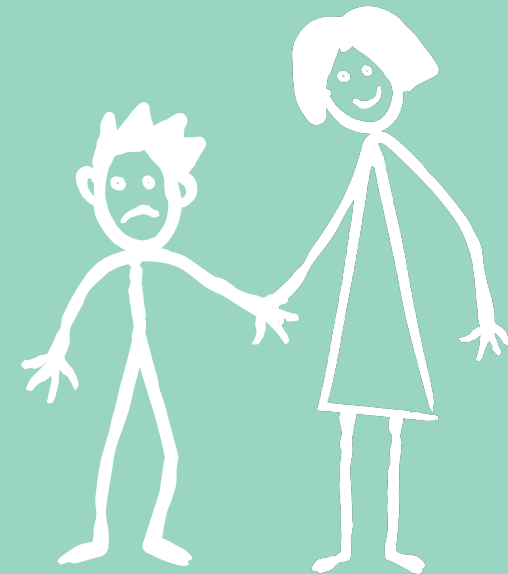
From consent to sexual exploitation, threats and fear of reporting

Scenario 2:

From consent to sexual exploitation, threats and fear of reporting



Aïcha, 16, has been talking online with Nassim, 25, who is a friend of a friend. Aïcha is flirting with him and feels valued knowing that an older man is interested in her. He tells her how much he likes her and how he would like to meet her in person. Aïcha knows her parents would disapprove of this, so she decides to meet with Nassim without telling them. She dresses prettily, meets him in a park where they have few drinks, and she agrees to go home with him. They start kissing, but when he wants to go further, she has doubts and asks him to stop. Nassim, however, insists and threatens to share their intimate conversations and images with others. Aïcha becomes afraid but doesn't know what to do. Nassim has sex with her that evening. Aïcha doesn't say anything to anyone, until she realises that she's pregnant. Only then does she confide in the school nurse about what happened, who – due to mandatory reporting policies – informs the police about the case.





QUESTIONS



Strongly
disagree



Disagree



No opinion



Agree



Strongly
agree



Q1: Aïcha should have
never agreed to meet Nassim
in person.



Q2: It's not really Nassim's fault -
Aïcha first agreed to go home with
him without being forced and then
she changed her mind.



QUESTIONS



Strongly disagree

Disagree

No opinion

Agree

Strongly agree



Q3: Aïcha is not a victim, as she could have left the situation at any moment, and she did not seem to resist very much.



Q4: Aïcha only reported the case to try to get money from Nassim. If it really was sexual abuse, she would have reported him immediately when the abuse took place.



Explainer

- Sexual abuse is never the child's fault. Even if Aïcha agreed to meet Nassim and come to his house, this does not mean that she consented to what happened after, or that this constitutes grounds to agree to have sex with Nassim. Consent is a process, and Aïcha has the right to change her mind at any time. When she refused, Nassim was responsible for stopping – instead he threatened her. Some aspects of this scenario can refer to grooming techniques, such as building trust, flattering Aïcha but also using coercion and threats to sexually take advantage of her. As Aïcha met with Nassim without her parents' knowledge, she may feel guilty and responsible for what happened. Many victims feel this way. However, Aïcha is not to blame for what happened to her as it's never the victim's fault – what Nassim did amounts to sexual abuse.



Explainer

- Trauma can also be debilitating for victims – Aïcha might have been overcome with feelings of shame and self-blame, or feared the consequences (ostracism, judgement, pregnancy) from disclosing and reporting the crime. The fact that she did not confide in anyone and did not report the abuse does not diminish the fact that she was a victim of abuse. Trauma can have significant impact on victims and prevent them from disclosing. A lack of knowledge and understanding of the impact of trauma on victims can lead law enforcement and other frontline workers to mistakenly believe that abuse did not occur. Many victims and survivors of child sexual exploitation and abuse wait years before they feel able to discuss what happened to them – and many never report it at all. This is why ECPAT International and other child rights organizations advocate for the removal of statutes of limitation on all sexual crimes against children.



Additional resources:



- Justice for sexual violence against children should have no expiration date.





Scenario 3

Unrecognized victims
when boys are sexually
exploited

<https://forms.office.com/r/n3zAvT35JH>





Scenario 3:

Unrecognized victims when boys are sexually exploited

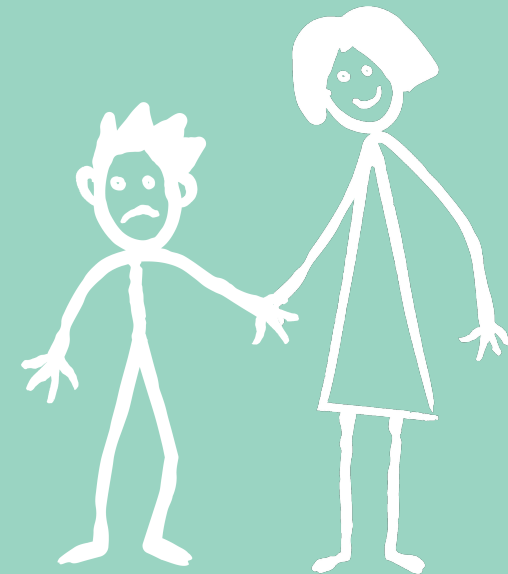
Scenario 3:

Unrecognized victims when boys are sexually exploited



Jabari is a 15-year-old boy who competes for the national swimming team. Jane, 35, is his coach. One day, after training, Jane comes in the changing room where Jabari is taking a shower. Jabari is embarrassed but Jane starts kissing him. He moves back and asks her to stop but she threatens to kick him out of the team if he refuses. She performs oral sex on him. When his sister, who is ten years older, notices that Jabari is withdrawn and unusually sad, she asks what happened– but he remains silent. Later, at a party when Jabari gets a bit drunk, he hints at what has happened.

Over time Jabari finally opens up to his sister, admitting his shame and fear. She takes him to the police station to file a complaint. The police, however, mostly laugh off the incident. They tell Jabari that he should be flattered that an older woman was interested: “It shows you are a real man!” Jabari’s sister is furious, and despite his plea not to, she complains to the swimming team. They dismiss her, claiming that boys can’t really be victims of this type of abuse, and suggest that he probably provoked and enjoyed the incident. They also claim they are not responsible for what happens after a competition.



QUESTIONS



Strongly
disagree

Disagree

No opinion

Agree

Strongly
agree



Q1: There is no reason for Jabari to feel ashamed about what happened to him.



Q2: Jabari's physical response and sexual arousal means he consented to the sexual encounter.



Q3: A woman cannot force a boy into a sexual act.



QUESTIONS



Strongly
disagree

Disagree

No opinion

Agree

Strongly
agree



Q4: The police officers handled Jabari's complaint appropriately.



Q5: The swimming team had no responsibility to address the situation.



Explainer

- Jabari is a child victim of sexual exploitation here. He should not be ashamed of what happened – it was not his fault. In fact, it is never the child victim's fault – it is always the responsibility of the perpetrator of the sexual abuse. Societal stereotypes and gender biases, however, often make it much harder for boys to report sexual abuse and exploitation. In many societies, boys are expected to be sexually active (especially through adolescence and puberty). This can lead to a misconstrued belief that boys might enjoy engaging in any form of sexual activity. Boys reporting sexual abuse can therefore be dismissed or not being believed. It is important to clarify that physical responses, such as arousal, do not indicate consent. Consent is a clear, voluntary, and informed agreement to participate in a sexual activity, and it cannot be assumed based on physical reactions alone.



Explainer

- Furthermore, the power imbalance between the coach and Jabari, along with the threat involved, clearly demonstrates an abuse of power and prevents Jabari from being able to give free and informed consent. Children can never consent to their sexual exploitation. ECPAT's research has shown that boys are victims of sexual violence and abuse everywhere, regardless of the country, culture or context. Even though the number of girls experiencing sexual violence is usually higher than boys, there is enough evidence to demonstrate that the sexual abuse and exploitation of boys is a reality everywhere that is often overlooked and downplayed. Social expectations of active sexual activity of boys and sexual arousal can have contributed to the sense of shame Jabari experienced and created additional barriers to disclose and report the case. Whatever he may be feeling, it is crucial to recognize he is not responsible, and a crime has been committed against him. It is also important to remember that sexual exploitation has no gender, and women are also capable of being perpetrators.



Explainer

- All service providers including the police have a responsibility to treat all cases of sexual abuse and exploitation of children with respect, compassion and understanding, and deal with the crimes reported without any form of judgement or blame for the victim. Sports organisations also have a responsibility towards their students and staff's well-being and safety. This includes implementing zero-tolerance policy on sexual exploitation and abuse of children by putting in place strong safeguards and adequate reporting mechanisms and disciplinary measures. The responsibility extends to all aspects of the athlete's involvement with the organization, including practice and competition, travels and accommodations, etc.



Scenario 4

From aspiration to
exploitation- the coercive
realities behind online

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Scenario 4:

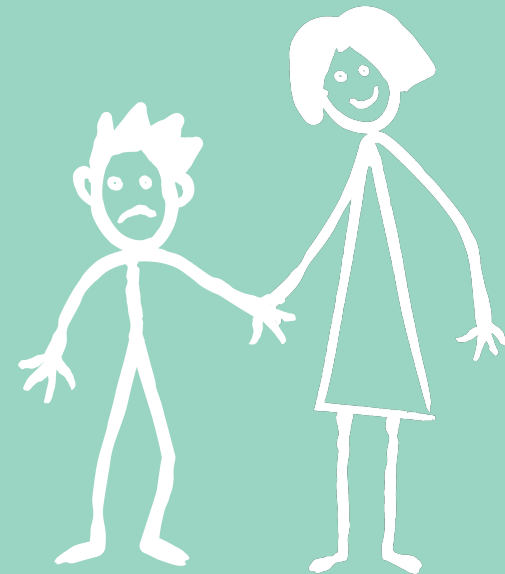
From aspiration to exploitation- the coercive realities behind online

Scenario 4:

From aspiration to exploitation - the coercive realities behind online



Naira, 15, came across a message on Messenger from a woman called Arti, who says she has seen her pictures online and offers her modelling work. Arti says that Naira is beautiful and has the potential to have a successful modelling career. Naira, who has never felt particularly pretty, is flattered. She is initially a bit suspicious but thinks she can trust Arti because she's a woman that appears to have many followers online and because her page seems very professional – so she responds. Arti eventually offers Naira a modelling contract. Naira is excited, but before signing, Arti mentions that a prerequisite is that she shares nude images of herself. Naira hesitates, but eventually agrees since she is getting paid, and the money is helping her purchase things her family can't afford. After a while, Naira starts feeling depressed, undervalued and wants to stop – in particular after some of the pictures leak onto the open Internet. But Arti threatens to show the images to her parents if she doesn't keep going. In despair, Naira tells her best friend. Eventually, someone sees the leaked pictures online and informs Naira's mother.





QUESTIONS



Strongly
disagree



Disagree



No opinion



Agree



Strongly
agree



Q1: Naira consented to sharing her images, so there is nothing that can be done.



Q2: Naira received money in exchange, so this is not exploitation.



QUESTIONS



Strongly disagree



Disagree



No opinion



Agree



Strongly agree



Q3: Naira should have told the police immediately and not just a friend - it shows this was not a serious issue.



Q4: The police should not waste time with cases like this as there was no physical contact and Naira was consenting.



Explainer

- Even though Naira agreed to share her pictures and was paid for them, this amounts to child sexual exploitation. Arti has taken advantage of Naira being a child, to sexually exploit her for money and committed a crime. The production and distribution of child sexual abuse material (CSAM) is considered a form of violence in most jurisdictions worldwide, regardless of whether the victim has taken the pictures herself. Accordingly, cases of child sexual exploitation and abuse do not have to involve any physical contact. [Research](#) shows that victims of non-contact child sexual abuse and exploitation can suffer from serious and long-lasting consequences.



Explainer

- The impact of child sexual abuse and exploitation, in person or online, on victims is complex. The consequences can include psychological and mental health issues, such as shame, guilt, anxiety, depression, trust issues. It can have an impact on their social lives and behaviours such as withdrawal, isolation, unhealthy relationships, and sometimes inappropriate sexualized behaviour. The digital dimension and lasting presence of the images on the internet can intensify feelings of powerlessness, and lack of control if the images cannot be removed, the potential impact it can have also on the victim's siblings and family, can contribute to ongoing trauma and disrupt healing. Whether online or in person, sexual exploitation deeply impacts the child victim's self-perception, relationships, and mental health, often leading to self-harm, anxiety, and depression—effects that can persist long-term even when no physical contact occurred.



Explainer

- The fact that Naira told a friend and her mother before approaching the police is very common – child victims often turn to peers first to talk about what has happened to them. This is a key reason why law enforcement should invest in training and other resources to better be able to receive and hear testimonies from child victims of sexual abuse and exploitation, always considering the digital dimension and related trauma these can bring.



Scenario 5

When child victims have
nowhere to turn

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Scenario 5:

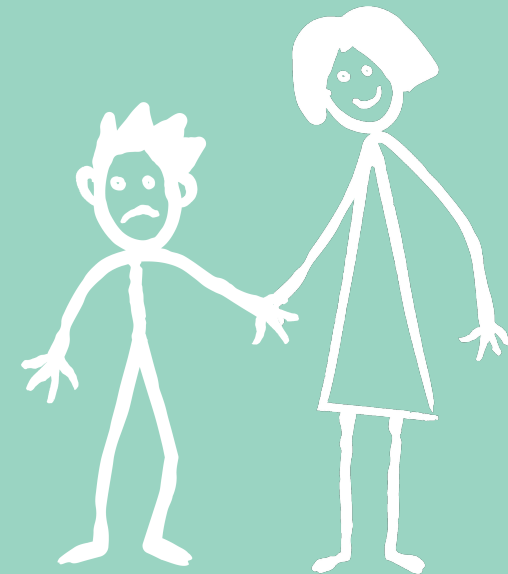
When child victims have nowhere to turn

Scenario 5:

When child victims have nowhere to turn



Twelve-year-old Carlos lives in a rural area several dozen miles from the capital. He spends much of his free time online playing video games and begins chatting to Pedro who is just 18 years old. The chats start off in a friendly way, and Carlos agrees when Pedro asks him for his handle on a popular messaging app. Soon, however, Pedro starts sending sexually explicit messages to Carlos, including sexual pictures of himself. Carlos is deeply uncomfortable and starts having problems sleeping. He doesn't understand much of what is happening to him. He finally tells his parents who take him to the police, but the police say they do not think the case actually amounts to abuse. They do not have a dedicated unit to deal with such cases– that is only available in the capital.





QUESTIONS



Strongly disagree

Disagree

No opinion

Agree

Strongly agree



Q1: Carlos has received unsolicited, sexually explicit images, without any physical contact with Pedro. This can be considered child sexual exploitation.



Q2: Carlos did not stop the conversation or block Pedro immediately, so this implies he consented.



QUESTIONS



Strongly disagree



Disagree



No opinion



Agree



Strongly agree



Q3: Child sexual exploitation can happen anywhere, so it's important for every station to be prepared to respond appropriately.



Q4: If Carlos' parents are worried, they can send him to the child protection service of the local area.



Explainer

- While it might seem counter-intuitive, ECPAT's research shows that children in rural areas are generally as vulnerable to technology-facilitated sexual abuse and exploitation as those living in cities. In 11 out of 13 countries surveyed in the context of Disrupting Harm, a study led by ECPAT International, INTERPOL and UNICEF, there was little to no difference between urban and rural children in terms of experiences of technology-facilitated sexual exploitation and abuse, suggesting a widespread risk irrespective of geographical setting. In fact, in some rural areas, children have more limited social lives and they may seek contact online to socialize and connect with others or explore their identities. Often, prevention and digital education programmes are not reaching rural areas as much as their urban counterparts, leaving children with less access to digital safety training.



Explainer

- Carlos may not have had physical contact with Pedro, but he has been exposed to unsolicited sexually explicit images which is a form of online child sexual exploitation.
- Unfortunately, even if technology-facilitated child sexual exploitation and abuse is also happening in rural areas, most prevention programmes and resources, both financial and human, for services including law enforcement and social and support services are often concentrated in urban areas. Public services are often not sufficiently equipped to deal with cases of child sexual abuse and exploitation in general, in particular when the abuse has taken place against boys. The online dimension of the abuse also adds difficulties for which services are not trained. This is something governments can and should address, if services are only available in urban areas- many victims will be left unprotected.



Explainer

- This would require ensuring service providers, including law enforcement, are trained and equipped in their initial education to respond to cases of child sexual exploitation and abuse, including gender and digital dimensions, ensuring access to easy-to-understand resources online for children and caregivers on the risks of technology-facilitated sexual exploitation and abuse; and channelling resources to combat and prevent technology-facilitated child sexual exploitation and abuse to rural areas.



Scenario 6

**A child victim blamed
is a perpetrator protected**

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Scenario 6:

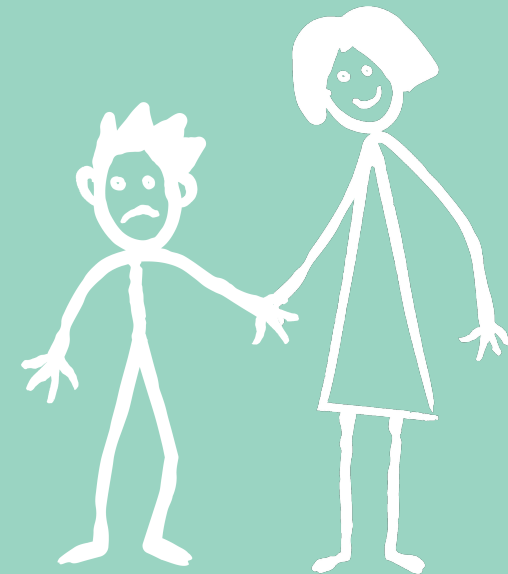
**A child victim blamed
is a perpetrator protected**

Scenario 6:

A child victim blamed is a perpetrator protected



Nong is 15 years old. She lives with her parents and four younger siblings. They have very little money at home so Nong had to stop school because her family couldn't afford to the tuition. One day a rich local businessman offers her money and some presents in exchange for sexual services. It's good money and this would help her buy a mobile phone she really wants. She accepts and this goes on for few weeks. In the community, people start talking about her as a "bad girl", and her father forces her away from home. She wants to go to the police for help, but when she does the police tell that since she accepted money, they can't do anything.





QUESTIONS



Strongly
disagree



Disagree



No opinion



Agree



Strongly
agree



Q1: It is a normal reaction
for a father to chase her away,
she is bringing shame to the family.



Q2: Nong has accepted the money,
so this is not exploitation.



QUESTIONS



Strongly
disagree



Disagree



No opinion



Agree



Strongly
agree



Q3: The businessman is supporting Nong with presents and money, so this is not exploitation.



Q4: The police can't do anything as she has taken money, therefore she is not a victim.



Explainer

- Nong is a victim of child sexual exploitation here. The type of behaviour the businessman engages in – offering money and presents in exchange for sexual services - is considered exploitative. Nong is a child (under 18) and she is being sexually exploited by an adult who is taking advantage of his position of power to manipulate her for sexual exploitation. The fact that Nong has accepted to take part in the sexual act has no relevance and does not negate the exploitation. Depending on the country, older children can legally consent to sexual activities, however the power imbalances between the businessman and Nong clearly demonstrates he is taking advantage of a situation of vulnerability in which Nong cannot freely consent. This is completely different from consensual sexual activities among peers as part of an adolescent sexual exploration and development, should not be equated to exploitative and abusive situations.



Explainer

- The adult businessman bears responsibility, giving (or accepting) money does not remove or diminish the harm and he is legally responsible for sexually exploiting a child. The police are responsible for enforcing of the law. Nong is a child victim of crime, and they have the responsibility to ensure her protection and prosecute the offender. Communities, service providers (and families) sometimes blame children for the abuse they suffer, mistakenly considering the abuse could be the results of the child's actions. This leads to blame being placed on the child victim rather than recognizing the responsibility of the offender. No child should never be blamed or punished for being sexually abused or exploited, because abuse only happens because a perpetrator is sexually offending.



Scenario 7

Knowledge is power – when
knowledge is accurate

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Scenario 7:

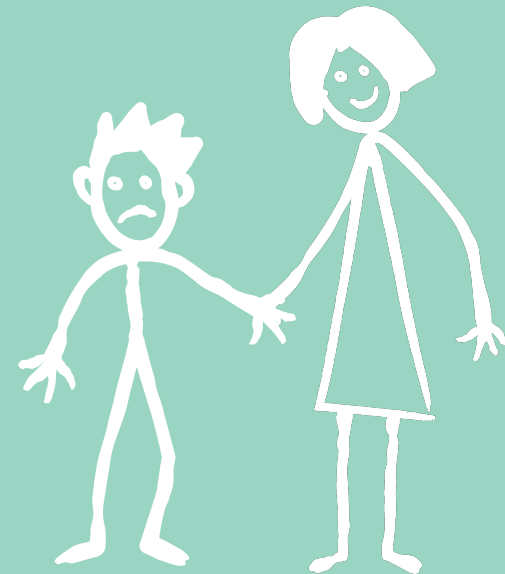
Knowledge is power – when knowledge is accurate

Scenario 7:

Knowledge is power – when knowledge is accurate



Julius is 13. As he hits puberty, he starts becoming more and more curious about his own sexuality. His friends tell him how to access porn websites on his phone, and this soon becomes something he accesses regularly. He also feels like he is learning about sex from watching the videos, especially as no one neither at school or at home is talking about sexuality in his conservative family. In his country, many parents and schools fear that talking about sexuality will push children into having sex early on. So Julius continues to access porn website while trying to hide from his parents, but one evening his mother catches him. Julius is mortified and feels immense shame.



QUESTIONS



Strongly
disagree



Disagree



No opinion



Agree



Strongly
agree



Q1: It is unhealthy for children to watch pornography.



Q2: Children should not be taught about sexuality and relationships in school, it will push them to be sexually active.



Q3: Sexuality and relationships education should not be taught at school - the internet offers a lot of information accessible to children interested.



QUESTIONS



Strongly disagree



Disagree



No opinion



Agree



Strongly agree



Q4: Sexuality and relationship classes can be very useful to teach children about healthy relationships, consent and boundaries, and how to be aware of sexual abuse and exploitation and other issues.



Q5: Discussing sexuality and healthy relationships with children does not help to protect them from sexual exploitation or abuse.



Explainer

- Children should be provided with accurate, age-appropriate information about their lives as part of their fundamental rights. Learning about sexuality and relationships in school, helps them develop a healthy understanding of boundaries, consent, and respect. Comprehensive sexuality and relationships education should be a part of national school curricula everywhere. There is evidence that comprehensive sexuality education (CSE) delay initiation of sexual activity and contribute to healthier sexual behaviours in adolescents.



Explainer

- It is vital that children learn from an early age through age-appropriate information, about sexual development and health, but also about emotional development, communication, respect for self and others, consent and personal boundaries in order to develop healthy relationships and sexual experiences. In addition, comprehensive sexuality and relationship education is important for overall well-being and understanding of personal safety both in-person and online and to recognize child sexual exploitation and abuse and to report abuse, avoiding to blame themselves if they experience sexual abuse and exploitation.



Explainer

- Teenagers and children will be naturally curious about sexuality and their changing bodies and feelings. Pornography is inappropriate for children because it offers very distorted views on sexuality and relationships, often portraying unrealistic and unhealthy representations of sex, consent, and relationships, which can influence and shape a child's understanding in harmful ways. Many forms of pornography can also depict harmful gender stereotypes, objectification of the sexual partner, and even violence, reinforcing unhealthy norms about power and control in relationships. We should not let children learn about sexuality through pornography.



Explainer

- The Internet is not always a reliable or safe source for such information. It would be important that trusted and reliable sites that offer sexual and relationships education are identified and made available to educators, parents to support and accompany their children in their development or to direct children directly. It is often more appropriate that children learn and get their questions answered in a safe and healthy environment like a school setting, or a youth clubs.



Scenario 8

**Silencing of survivors
and truth denied**

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Scenario 8:

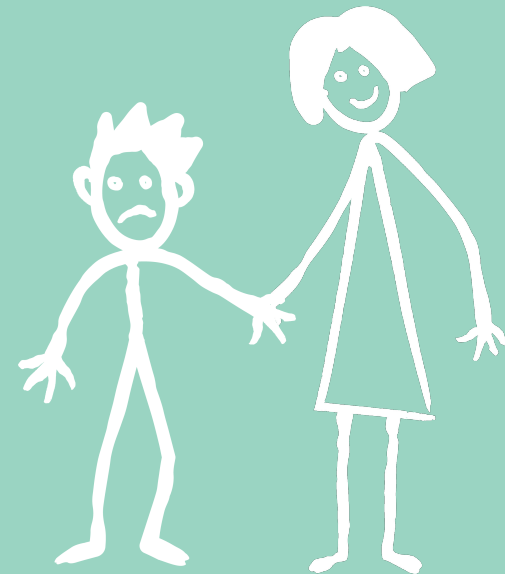
Silencing of survivors and truth denied

Scenario 8:

Silencing of survivors and truth denied



Amit is a 28-year-old man living with his wife and newborn child. While his life looks happy from the outside, Amit has also carried the trauma of being sexually assaulted when he was a boy. He thinks this has something to do with the panic attacks he has suffered for several years. The perpetrator was a close family member, his uncle Arjun, who assaulted him repeatedly when he was between 8 and 10 years old. Arjun, however, still enjoys a close relationship with Amit's parents who are unaware of the abuse. Amit has felt ashamed about what happened his whole life and never really told anyone. He thought it was somehow his fault, and worried that he would cause real harm to family if he told his parents. One day, Amit watches a documentary about child sexual exploitation and abuse and decides that he should talk about what happened – he is worried that Arjun could try something with his own child, or might have hurt others. He tells his parents, who react angrily. They say that Arjun is a great guy who could never have done something like that – and if it was true, why did Amit wait almost two decades to say something? Amit's parents tell him that he must be imagining things, and that he should absolutely not take his wild claims any further.





QUESTIONS



Strongly disagree



Disagree



No opinion



Agree



Strongly agree



Q1: Amit should not have said anything. The abuse happened almost 20 years ago – it's too late to do anything about it.



Q2: Amit's parents are right to doubt his story. Most child sexual abuse and exploitation is perpetrated by strangers, not in the family.



QUESTIONS



Strongly disagree

Disagree

No opinion

Agree

Strongly agree



Q3: Even if Amit does report the abuse to police, it would be useless – statutes of limitation (the maximum time after an event within which legal proceedings may be initiated) means the police cannot do anything.



Q4: The fact that Amit has waited for many years to say anything is normal – many victims are too traumatised to report, and some never do.



Explainer

- The fact that Amit waited until he was an adult to report abuse is not unusual at all. In fact, most victims never tell anyone about what happened to them. In a major study of more than 20,000 adult victims of child sexual exploitation and abuse, only one-quarter had told someone within a year of when the abuse happened – more than 20% waited at least a decade before doing so. This is particularly true for boys and men, for whom feelings of shame can be even stronger. Amit's parents are wrong to cast doubt on his story – they should have trusted him and supported him, and helped him approach authorities about the best way forward.

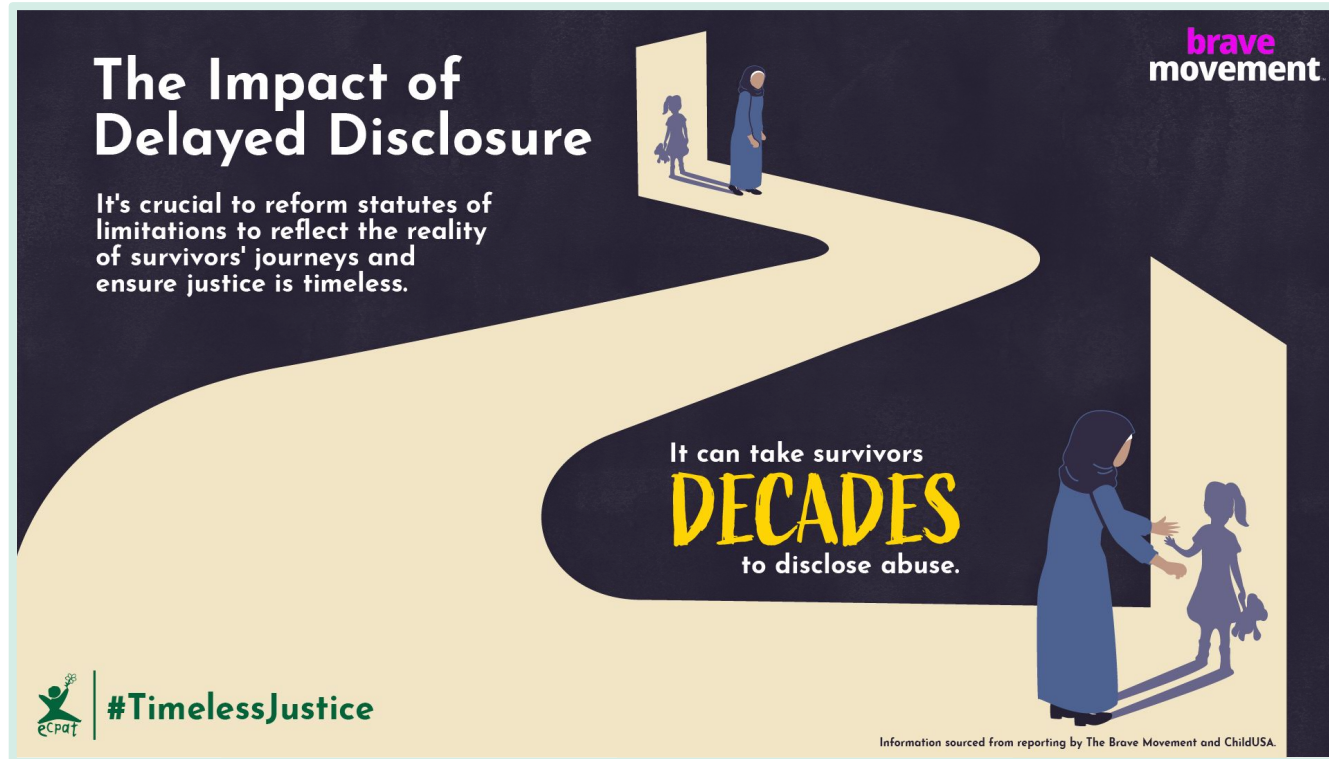


Explainer

- Amit is right to worry that he might not have been Arjun's only victim – including inside their family. In fact, despite the real threat of “stranger danger”, most child sexual exploitation and abuse is perpetrated from people within the victim's “circle of trust”, including family members or peers.
- It is correct, however, that in some countries time limit to report a crime of child sexual exploitation and abuse means that perpetrators cannot always be held to account. This is something governments should address through legal reform, in consultation with experts, CSOs and victims themselves.



Additional resources:



- To remove these limitations, sign our Petition 'Timeless Justice' [Justice for sexual violence against children should have no expiration date](#)
- [Timeless justice video](#)





Scenario 9

**Anyone, anywhere - child
victim without knowing**

<https://forms.office.com/r/UBP5KsM6CZ>





Scenario 9:

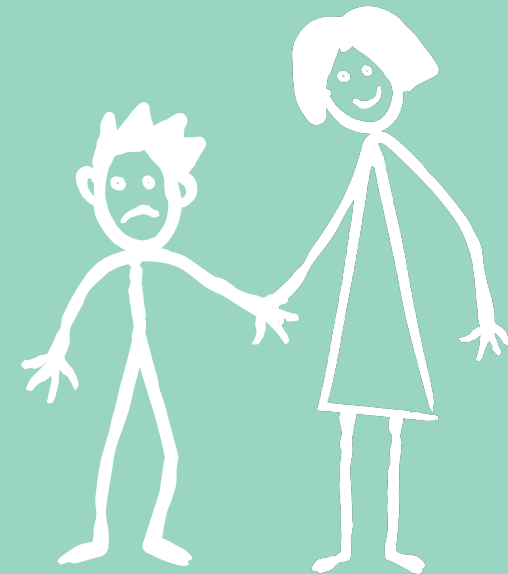
Anyone, anywhere - child victim without knowing

Scenario 9:

Anyone, anywhere – child victim without knowing



Isabel has lived a happy life for 10 years with her second husband Javier and her daughter Carla, 14 years old. Javier has always taken good care of Carla and is a loving husband and stepfather. One day, Javier is away and while looking for old photos on their computer, Isabel discovers disturbing images of Carla undressed. The images seem to have been taken from their bathroom while Carla was showering. Carla was not aware of these images. Isabel immediately contacts the police. After investigation they discover that Javier was exchanging these materials with many others on the Internet. These men included young people at university, older retired men, successful businessmen, former convicts, and schoolteachers.



QUESTIONS



Strongly
disagree



Disagree



No opinion



Agree



Strongly
agree



Q1: Javier is a loving husband and father with no prior criminal record - it's hard to believe he would do something like this.



Q2: Carla was not even aware of the images being taken and distributed so she will not suffer from trauma.



Q3: Isabel should have seen the signs earlier. If she was more observant, she might have noticed something suspicious about Javier's behaviour sooner.

QUESTIONS



Strongly
disagree

Disagree

No opinion

Agree

Strongly
agree



Q4: Sexual offenders are usually strangers or have a history of criminal behaviour, and don't usually live seemingly ordinary lives.



Q5: People like Javier should be sent to prison as they will always re-offend.



Q6: If this country had a sex offender registry, Carla would have been protected as Isabel could have known.



Explainer

- Sexual offenders do not have to fit a particular, easily identifiable profile. Child sexual abuse and exploitation can be perpetrated by anyone, regardless of their age, gender, status in the community or occupation. It is important to avoid assuming that only certain people are capable of committing such acts and we should encourage communities to develop a broader understanding of the complexity of child sexual abuse and exploitation. Offenders can come from any walk of life, and understanding this is crucial for recognizing and preventing abuse in diverse contexts. They can appear caring, respectful, trustworthy. They can be school friends, neighbours, family members, religious leaders, sports coaches, doctors or schoolteachers. Perpetrators should be punished for crimes they have committed, but there must also be a holistic response to the problem – including adequate prevention measures, and therapeutic support in certain circumstances.



Explainer

- Sex offender registries, including on crimes against children, play a significant role in law enforcement's efforts to protect children and criminalise child sexual abuse and exploitation. Their use is complex, however, and raise both ethical and operational questions. More than 41 countries, territories or jurisdictions had adopted legislation governing sex offender registration systems by September 2022, but the nature of these laws vary considerably. In most countries, however, these are not public, so Isabel could not have accessed information even if Javier had been convicted in the past.



Scenario 10

No child - no harm the
dangerous myth behind
AI-generated child sexual
abuse material (CSAM)

<https://forms.office.com/r/T20XEckU5c>





Scenario 10:

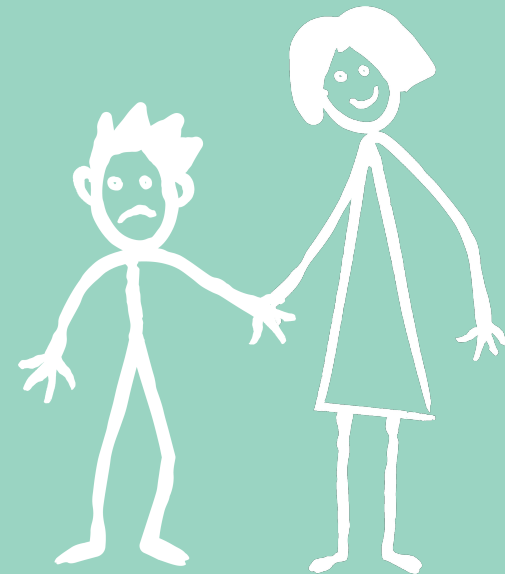
**No child - no harm
the dangerous myth behind
AI-generated child sexual
abuse material (CSAM)**

Scenario 10:



No child - no harm - the dangerous myth behind AI-generated child sexual abuse material (CSAM)

Jonatan, 16 years old, is a digital artist who enjoys experimenting with AI-generated images. He's part of an online art community where users create and share AI-generated pictures. One day, he stumbles across a private group where some members are generating sexualised images of fictional children using AI tools. Jonatan is unsettled and questions whether this is legal or ethical. The group's members insist that because the images are AI-generated and no real child was involved, there's no harm. Some even argue that this content could help prevent real abuse. Still unsure, Jonatan brings up the topic with his older sister, Mia who is a social worker. She claims that AI-generated CSAM is far from harmless—it fuels dangerous desires, spreads harmful ideas about children, and makes it easier for perpetrators to manipulate or groom child victims. It also makes it harder for law enforcement to track down actual abusers because perpetrators can claim that real images are “AI-generated fakes.” Realising the impact, Jonatan decides to leave the group and report it.



QUESTIONS



Strongly
disagree

Disagree

No opinion

Agree

Strongly
agree



Q1: AI generated CSAM is not harmful, because the children displayed in the pictures are not real.



Q2: AI generated CSAM can prevent the production and sharing of real CSAM.



Q3: It is difficult for law enforcement to distinguish AI generated CSAM from the one that results from real-life abuse.



QUESTIONS



Strongly
disagree



Disagree



No opinion



Agree



Strongly
agree



Q4: Jonatan did the right thing
by leaving the community.



Q5: Generating fictionalised, AI
images should be considered an
exercise of the right to freedom of
expression.



Explainer

- Contrary to the argument that AI-generated images are harmless because no real children are involved, creating or sharing AI-generated child sexual abuse material directly contributes to harmful behaviours and is illegal in many jurisdictions. These images normalize the sexualization of children and potentially fuel addiction to CSAM. Research has shown that individuals who use CSAM may cross over from online offending to in-person sexual exploitation of children. Moreover, AI-generated content complicates the work of law enforcement and hotlines, as it is very time-consuming to differentiate the “real” CSAM from AI generated one. Perpetrators may also claim that the CSAM they produce, possess, or distribute, is fake.



Explainer

- To respond to this, many European countries and the EU are in the process of criminalizing AI-generated CSAM, the UK also seeking to criminalize tools that are used to create such content. Jonatan's decision to report the incident was the right one and his sister was able to share accurate and up to date information about the phenomena. It's crucial that there are instances, such as social workers and law enforcement, who are knowledgeable about the problem and can intervene as well as support citizens who encounter AI generated offences. To support this development, governments, tech companies, law enforcement, and CSOs need to develop guidelines and safeguards to prevent AI tools harming children.



Scenario 11

**'It looks real' – the harm
behind AI manipulated
CSAM**

<https://forms.office.com/r/pyA27anVV8>





Scenario 11:

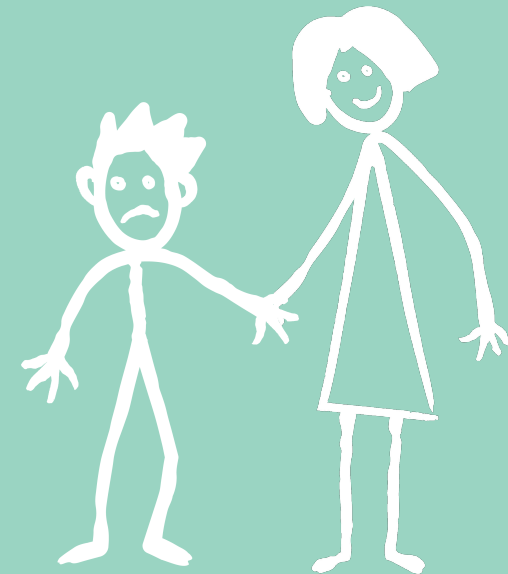
'It looks real' – the harm behind AI manipulated CSAM

Scenario 11:

'It looks real' – the harm behind AI manipulated CSAM



Pradeep, 12 years old, loves making new friends online. He often chats in a social gaming community where he met Min, a friendly and funny 15-year-old. Over the weeks, Min gains Pradeep's trust. He asks about his hobbies and creates a bond with him. One day, he asks Pradeep for a picture. Pradeep hesitates, but he reassures him: "It doesn't have to be anything weird—just a fun selfie! I just want to see the real you." Pradeep sends a simple smiling picture. A few days later, Min sends a shocking image—it looks like Pradeep, but in an inappropriate pose. Pradeep is horrified. "I never took this picture! How did you make this?" Min tells him that it's just AI and that it's "no big deal." But then he starts threatening him: "If you don't send me a real picture, I'll send this to your school and parents. No one will believe it's fake." Pradeep panics. He doesn't know what to do.





QUESTIONS



Strongly disagree

Disagree

No opinion

Agree

Strongly agree



Q1: Pradeep should not mention the blackmail to anyone – it's his fault that he trusted Min.



Q2: AI generated CSAM is not abusive, because it doesn't correspond with reality.



QUESTIONS



Strongly
disagree



Disagree



No opinion



Agree



Strongly
agree



Q3: Care takers and authorities are the ones who should support Pradeep and take care of reporting the case.



Q4: The fact that Pradeep is under huge distress is a normal reaction to sexual extortion.



Explainer

- AI-generated CSAM, also known as deepfake CSAM, allows perpetrators to create convincing images of their victims and use them for blackmail. Girls and boys increasingly encounter this type of sexual extortion. Victims and survivors feel cornered and that it is impossible to prove these images as fake. This type of abuse is extremely harmful. It results in fear, shame, isolation – in the worst case suicide – and these extreme feelings are often successfully used to coerce victims into compliance. In this situation, it would be of key importance for Pradeep to have a trusted adult. Adults are responsible to support children emotionally, helping them dealing with the situation, and reporting sexual extortion cases for the law enforcement.



Explainer

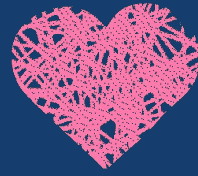
- AI enabled sexual extortion cases are in the rise and authorities as well as decision-makers seek efficient ways to address it. Many European countries and the EU are in the process of criminalizing AI-generated CSAM and the UK is also seeking to criminalize tools that are used to create such content. In addition to legislation, governments, international, regional, and civil society organizations, technology companies, and child protection must create and implement protective measures, such as platform regulations, AI detection tools, awareness campaigns and easily accessible reporting mechanisms for children and care takers.



Additional resources:

- For more information, visit [Myths - ECPAT](https://www.ecpat.org/myths)
www.ecpat.org/myths
- If you have feedback or suggestions, please
contact researchteam@ecpat.org





Thank You

