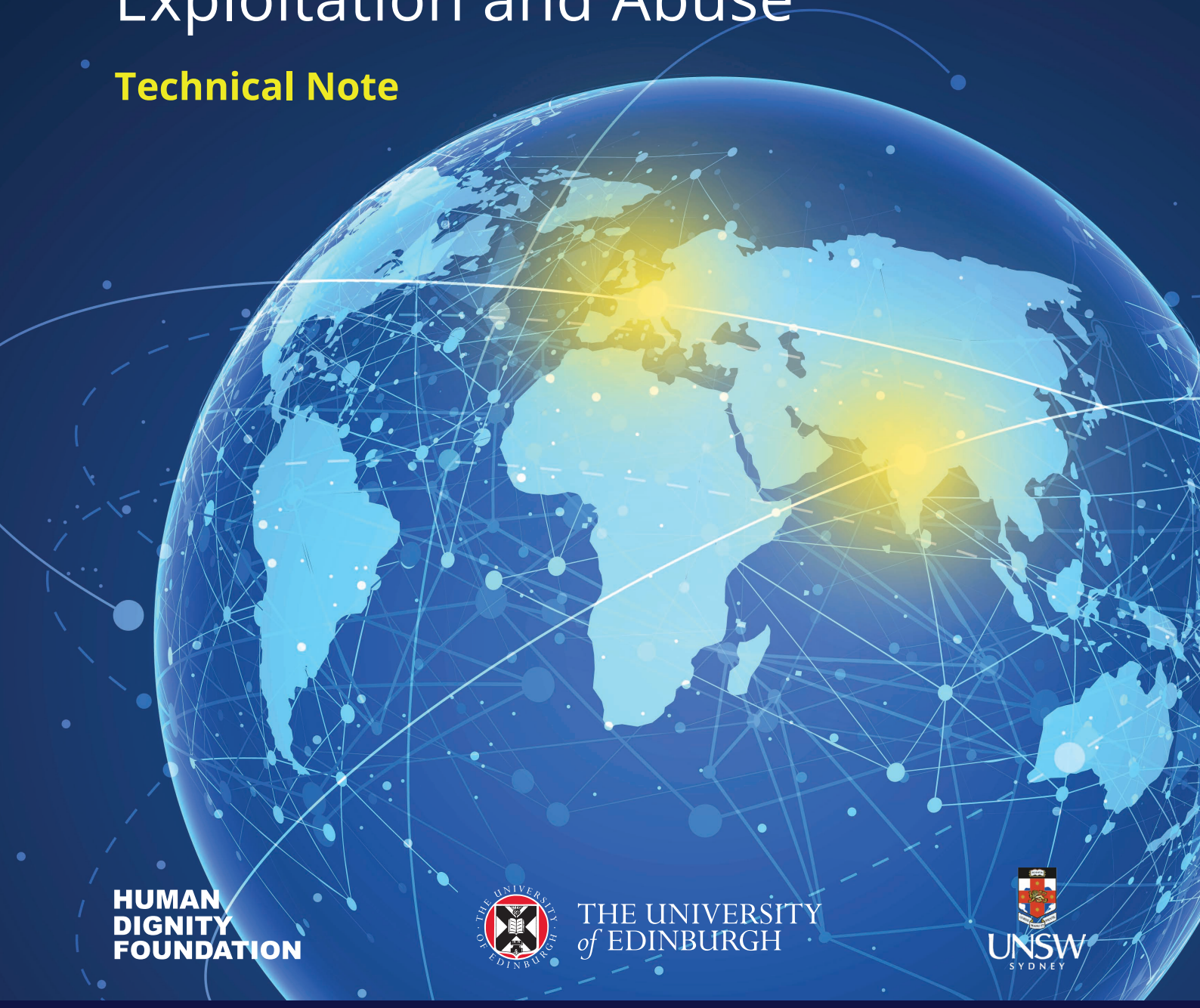
CHILDLIGHT
Global Child Safety Institute

2025
INTO THE LIGHT
Index on Global Child Sexual Exploitation and Abuse

Technical Note



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Get help

Behind every number is a child. If you or someone you know needs support for child sexual exploitation and abuse, or if you are concerned that you might hurt a child, please visit Child Helpline International, Brave Movement or Stop it Now.

If you see harmful imagery or content online concerning a child, please report it to NCMEC, INHOPE, IWF or C3P.

Disclaimer

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INTO THE LIGHT
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Established by

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INTRODUCTION

About Childlight – Global Child Safety Institute

Childlight – Global Child Safety Institute is an independent, data-driven organisation dedicated to preventing and responding to child sexual exploitation and abuse (CSEA) worldwide. Founded by Human Dignity Foundation and hosted by the University of Edinburgh and the University of New South Wales, alongside a range of data partners, we bring together world-class expertise in epidemiology, data science, public health and child protection to create a robust evidence base for action. Our mission is clear: to use data to protect children and to work alongside frontline practitioners, policymakers and other stakeholders to ensure that evidence is translated into meaningful change. Our role as a global data institute is to generate, curate and share high-quality information and to support others in using it effectively within their own contexts. We believe that credible, accessible and actionable data is one of the most powerful tools for safeguarding children.

About the 2025 Into the Light Index

In 2024, Childlight launched the world's first comprehensive global index estimating the prevalence of technology-facilitated (TF-)CSEA. This inaugural Into the Light Index on Global Child Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (ITL Index 2024) was a milestone in the field, producing a new conceptual framework, the first global and regional prevalence estimates from population surveys, the first country-level perpetration prevalence estimates, and harmonised indicators on child sexual abuse material (CSAM) drawn from multiple data sources. We began with TF-CSEA because it was an urgent entry point with previous research, which had been largely limited

to high-income countries and had not captured the full picture from population-based surveys. ITL Index 2024 filled this critical gap, introducing new analyses on perpetration, aligning disparate CSAM datasets and highlighting the structural challenges that must be addressed to strengthen global monitoring.

The 2025 Into the Light Index on Global Child Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (ITL Index 2025) marks a step change in both scope and ambition. We have expanded the Index in three major ways.

First, **broader scope:** While ITL Index 2024 focused exclusively on TF-CSEA, the 2025 edition addresses offline CSEA as well. This includes rape and sexual assault of a child, using data from population-based surveys. By integrating these forms of abuse into the Index, we can better understand how online and offline harms might intersect.

Second, **new data sources:** In ITL Index 2025, we incorporated frontline data from publicly available policing crime statistics and child helpline data. The policing crime statistics reflect a dedicated deep dive into this data source for nine countries. The addition of child helpline data was made possible through a pioneering partnership with Child Helpline International (CHI), allowing us to include information that reflects the types of abuse that are being logged by helplines. By including frontline data through official statistics with insights from helplines we can identify both reported crimes and the often-hidden insights into abuse that never reach any statutory services.

Third, **country-level focus:** For the first time, we are producing country-level indicators and estimates, where data is available. ITL Index 2025 focuses on Western Europe and South Asia, as defined in UNICEF's regional classification (UNICEF 2023b). These two regions were chosen to start the country-level focus because they were both identified in ITL Index 2024 as having a high prevalence of TF-CSEA across indicators. This country-level approach provides governments, civil society and other actors with tailored, context-specific evidence. Over the coming years, this approach will be expanded to other regions, with our 2026 edition focusing on North America, Latin America and the Caribbean, and East Asia and the Pacific.

Other innovations in 2025

Several new initiatives enhance the depth and usability of ITL Index 2025. In this edition, Childlight's **Index Impact and Communications Working Groups** bring together CSEA data experts and regional actors from nearly every country in focus, ensuring that findings are translated into concrete safeguarding and prevention actions. Our **Index Technical Subcommittee** continues to guide the ITL Index with world-leading expert advice and guidance in prevalence estimation, frontline data and big data analysis. A **Supplemental Thematic Analysis Report** synthesises results across all indicators to identify trends, patterns and actionable insights. Finally, we are the first global violence prevention data institute to seek Enhancing Quality in Preclinical Data (EQIPD) accreditation, embedding rigorous, clinically informed data-handling and quality assurance standards into every stage of our work.

What the Technical Note covers

This Technical Note provides all the detailed methodological information for readers seeking to understand how the ITL 2025 was developed including details on the data sources, analytical strategies, computational and coding frameworks as well as limitations from the data.

This Technical Note is structured according to the indicator areas of the ITL 2025, matching the order found on our online Interactive Index Dashboard:

1. CSAM Data
2. Victimisation Data
3. Frontline Data

The detailed technical information for each of these areas is presented within these chapters. This Technical Note is intended to maximise the accessibility, accountability, usability, reproducibility and ultimately the impact of ITL Index 2025, giving users the tools they need to turn evidence into action. We encourage you to build on our work using this information and the accompanying datasets. If you do use our datasets or find this information useful for studies you are conducting, please do let us know (childlight@ed.ac.uk). We are happy to support others in the journey to enhancing the data foundations and evidence to improve safeguarding, **because children can't wait.**

PART 1

Child Sexual Abuse Material (CSAM) Indicator Area

CSAM refers to images and videos that show the sexual abuse of children. For Childlight's ITL Index on Global CSEA, we analyse metadata related to these materials, working with data provided by key organisations that have government mandates to collect this content for law enforcement and takedown purposes. Our ITL Index 2025 brings together data from the Internet Watch Foundation (IWF), International Association of Internet Hotline Providers (INHOPE), the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC), Child Rescue Coalition (CRC), THORN and the Canadian Centre for Child Protection (C3P) to examine multiple indicators, including total volume, CSAM rate, and new and emerging trends such as AI generated child sexual abuse material (AI CSAM).

CSAM data is unique within the ITL Index 2025, because it is drawn from large-scale, real-time systems that are continually updated, offering broad country-level coverage. When triangulated with other data sources, these datasets help us to better understand the scale and dynamics of CSEA in national, regional, and global contexts, and how these change over time. Working closely with and supported by the data owners, we identify where harmonisation across sources is possible, where limitations remain, and what can and cannot be concluded from these datasets. The results of this analysis are presented in ITL Index 2025 and will inform the global and regional updates of our 2026 edition of the Index, strengthening the evidence base for prevention, policy and enforcement efforts.

The Scale and Nature of CSAM Online – Technical Note

Stevenson, J., Moore, C., Slater, C., Quayle, E., Finkelhor, D., Whitten, T., Martollozzo, E., and Fry, D.

Introduction

Child sexual abuse material (CSAM) plays an important role in the sexual abuse of children online, providing the evidence of the initial abuse as well as being a source of the ongoing harm to those who have been abused. This material has been described as stripping its victims of their "dignity and humanity" and reducing their existence to the images of their abuse (Canadian Centre for Child Protection, 2018). Child sexual abuse material refers to images of minors being sexually abused or displayed for purposes of sexual gratification. It can include fabricated images made for purposes of extortion or denigration. It can be photos or videos. Other terms used to apply to these materials are child sexual abuse images (CSAI), child sexual exploitation material (CSEM), child abuse material (CAM), child exploitation material (CEM), Image-based sexual abuse (IBSA), and child pornography (CP).

Research has shown that CSAM is distinct and particularly harmful form of technology facilitated abuse. The public exposure and possible longevity of its availability are elements believed to contribute to its harm.

By investigating nature and scale of CSAM online, the index can provide a clearer picture of the long-term harms faced by victims of sexual abuse and exploitation. The CSAM Indicator should be seen as complimenting the data found in the other two indicator areas by unveiling the true scale of sexual harms against children globally.

Purpose

The following details the decision-making and contextual information required to understand the data presented in the Into the Light Index 2025. This indicator not only measures perpetrator behaviour in the form of upload, and ongoing demand for CSAM. The technical note includes information concerning data collection processes with details including inclusion and exclusion criteria. There is also a detailed explanation of the CSAM data practices for each source organisation which helps to explain how the data was originally collated and for what purpose. Finally, the document explains the process of data harmonisation and analysis that produced the data.

Data Collection

The data collection process for the CSAM indicator area began with an online scoping of organisations committed to the analysis and receipt of reports of CSAM from around the world. Based on this review, six organisations were identified as in scope for the Index, based on their mission, scope and data availability since the publication of the first Into the Light Index. This criterion was based on both inclusionary and exclusionary criteria.

Inclusion Criteria

1. Publicly available data set/results relevant to CSAM upload, hosting or download
2. Published annually/since 2023 etc
3. Made available by organisation with the necessary mandate to analyse CSAM

Exclusion Criteria

1. Not publicly available
2. Not specific to CSAM upload, hosting or download
3. Not published annually/not published since 2023 etc

These organisations had all published public reports on the availability and distribution of material in the two years following the 2023 Into the Light report, which allowed for a comparative analysis of the data for the years 2023 and 2024. They are also some of the only organisations who are able to provide evidence-based analysis of the sensitive content, owing to their permissions and mandates in their jurisdictions. The data reports which they produce are impacted by the responsibility of these organisations to ensure the safety of the victims and survivors portrayed in the abuse material in addition to other privacy considerations (legislation, regulation etc.). Only limited information is shared publicly about CSAM content so as to avoid any concerns of identification of the material or victims within the produced reports.

Of the chosen organisations, three of them have a longer history of publishing annual reports with relevant CSAM data: the Internet Watch Foundation (IWF), INHOPE and the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC) have all produced annual reports for at least five years. Thorn is another organisation which conducts CSAM analysis and released the first of what are anticipated to be annual reports in 2023. To compliment the findings of the first Into the Light Index data, which included analysis from a one-off report on Project Arachnid, information was sourced from multiple publications produced by the Canadian Centre for Child Protection who own and operate the Project Arachnid tool. This data was specific to certain elements that were being highlighted by the organisation, specifically

around AI-Generated CSAM and sexual extortion. Due to the way in which The Canadian Centre for Child Protection published data, the information included was a combination of data from their report processing Cybertip program and their Project Arachnid software. Finally, data on global availability of CSAM was sourced from the privately held dataset owned by Child Rescue Coalition.

NCMEC provided additional CSAM characteristics in their annual report in a supplemental technical report for the Office of Justice Programs in 2024, based on additional information provided by law enforcement. The data from 2023 and 2024 was extracted from the included reports and was used to supplement and add more granular detail to the figures reported in the annual NCMEC report.

While there is a unified goal across all organisations to safeguard children, identify victims and remove content, organisational and methodological differences and focus led to variation in the content of their reports. These differences should not be seen as any indication of inadequacy or inaccuracy in any of the reports; rather, they are illustrative of varied organisational missions and approaches, all of which make a distinctive contribution to our understanding of the problem (see Table 2). The data differences may also point to an inherent bias in data collection linked to various mandates and organisational focus. INHOPE, IWF and C3P receive reports from the general public and to a lesser extent technology companies. Public reports relate to the presence of what is believed to be CSAM as well as incidents of grooming or sexual extortion of a known minor. This is also the case for NCMEC. However the majority of its reports come from technology companies who, in the US, are mandated to report all online child sexual exploitation and abuse on their platforms. THORN, IWF and C3P also use web-based software to proactively detect CSAM on areas of the open/clear web known to be used to host and distribute CSAM. This actively produces the largest amount of confirmed/identified CSAM in their reports. This data reflects CSAM through the online exploitation of minors identified in cross-platform sharing of intelligence about suspicious signals and behavioural patterns that violate company policies. These organisations all play a role in safeguarding children online and advocating for the removal of CSAM. Together they identify a significant portion of the image-based abuse of children and youth online. Due to the independent nature of these organisations, there is potential overlap between the reported content, though the degree to which this occurs has not been assessed. The data contained within the reports is complex as it represents a variety of sources coming from the public, technology companies and specially developed tools to seek out CSAM. Through all these sources the organisations provide the public with information concerning the nature and volume of CSAM and related exploitative activities. Overtime, reporting of this the data has become more developed and granular with many of the organisations including new metrics to better identify gaps or areas for increased monitoring. Please see Appendix for a table comparing the organisations.

Data Organisation Overview

Internet Watch Foundation (IWF)

The Internet Watch Foundation acts as the hotline (a reporting body usually affiliated with government for responding to public concerns) for child sexual abuse and exploitation in the United Kingdom. The IWF acts as an active member of INHOPE thus contributing analysis to their reporting portal. They have powers provided by the Safety Net Foundation which tasked IWF with the rating, reporting and responsibility of attending to child sexual abuse material online. Since its inception, the IWF has continued to receive reports from the public and industry on CSAM located online. It has also developed web crawlers (software that automatically detects, analyses and collects information online), domain blocking (webpage's that are blocked due to harmful or illegal content) and other technologies which assist in the identification and location of known CSAM online. Once located the IWF sends removal notices if the hosting provider is based in the UK. If hosted outside the United Kingdom the content is sent to INHOPE for the swift removal by the member hotlines through similar notices.

Canadian Centre for Child Protection (C3P)

The Canadian Centre for Child Protection is the mandated reporting hotline for technology-facilitated child sexual exploitation and abuse in Canada. It collects reports from the public of sexual crimes against children. C3P operates its own web crawler which is called Project Arachnid, which uses both perceptual (matching images which are visually similar) and exact hash matching (images which match based on alphanumeric identifiers assigned to all files) to flag images for analyst review, a process which uses digital identifiers to flag known images of CSAM. C3P also manages a domain blocking list for Canadian web service providers but their blocking power only extends to Canada. Using Project Arachnid and manual notices, C3P works toward the removal of all classified sexual imagery of children, legal but harmful content as well as illegal content. It ensures every report is forwarded on to law enforcement, including to local law enforcement in Canada or via the International Policing Body which forwards all international reports outside of Canada.

National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC)

NCMEC is the mandated receiving body for reporting of technology-facilitated child sexual exploitation and abuse in the United States. While the largest number of NCMEC reports come from technology companies, they come from the general public. Reports are prioritised by NCMEC analysts based on the available information concerning location, illegality, recency and identifiable content, and, if thought to be actionable, sent to law enforcement in the United States. Where location is outside the United States, an automated report is sent to country-specific law enforcement agencies.

INHOPE

INHOPE act as the collective body for many of the international hotlines for reporting child sexual exploitation and abuse. These hotlines process public reporting of suspected instances of technology-facilitated child sexual exploitation and abuse in their jurisdiction INHOPE represents a total of 54 hotlines covering 50 countries worldwide who provide/report CSAM analysis data. As such the reporting ability and responsibilities differ between the various hotlines. INHOPE works with all hotlines to process reports and analyse CSAM in a comparable way using software called ICCAM ("I see Child Abuse Material") which was developed to provide a central system for all member hotlines. INHOPE then issues notice, and takedown orders based on the hosting country and forwards information to the local law enforcement agencies. IWF is a part of the INHOPE network and as such Its data is also included in the total figures presented in the INHOPE annual report.

THORN

THORN is a non-profit technology company which in partnership with NCMEC and other organisations, operate a number of technological solutions to address online safety and prevention of technology-facilitated child sexual exploitation and abuse. THORN licenses and develops content identification software called Safer. Safer finds exact matches with cryptographic hashes and slightly altered images and is a proprietary perceptual hashing technology. The material is then forwarded through reporting processes to NCMEC, for further review and processing according to NCMEC's own mandates.

Child Rescue Coalition (CRC)

Child Rescue Coalition is a non-profit organisation which monitors file sharing networks to locate and identify users sharing child sexual abuse material. It works with international law enforcement to help flag and investigate the content. Once this is completed law enforcement can proceed with any criminal charges against those who are sharing it on their network. By necessity, users on a file sharing network are in possession of child sexual abuse material and may also be contributing to its distribution. Filesharing networks differ from other interactions in that the collective possession and sharing of a file increases the speed with which it can be transferred to other users in the network. Therefore, it is in the best interests of the network that users both possess and make visible all files that they have on their personal devices (laptops, servers, phones or memory drives).

Data Analysis

Childlight accessed the reports using the websites for each organisation, where the information was typically published in a downloadable format. The researchers read through each report, extracting numerical data on the sharing, detection, and characteristics of CSAM in each dataset. The researchers also gathered data concerning the information sources and outputs for each organisation, to help understand similarities and differences across data sources. Where necessary, Childlight converted reported counts into percentages to two decimal points. These calculations were double-checked by three members of the Childlight research team. Any other numbers or percentages included in the index were taken directly from the source reports unless otherwise noted.

All of the organisations measured their CSAM data in different ways, whether it was report volume, sightings of reported content online, or the amount of times content had been shared by offenders, etc. Due to this variance, it was not appropriate to simply compare the volume of material or the sum of individual data points. Rather, Childlight chose to provide percentages for each of the common characteristics based on that organisation's total dataset, as it provided a more unified analysis of the numbers and in part accounted for the differences in processing and collection of information. It was thought that comparison among characteristics might shed light on the kinds of material represented in different data sets. Where any trend information is available, fluctuations up or down may not reflect real changes in the quantities of material being circulated or accessed. Changes may result from new technologies being applied for detection, more organisations committing to the reporting system, or changes in organisational capacities to process reports.

Country/Regional Analysis

Childlight gathered data from each report on the countries/jurisdictions where the reports/notices regarding CSAM were sent. Often this information was based on the assessed internet host country location, which may be different from where the abuse was recorded. In certain cases, reports may be sent based on the assessed location where the content was uploaded or where the abuse is suspected to have occurred, which was the case specifically for NCMEC. In other cases, the reports were sent to the hosting location for electronic service providers and or internet service providers. Matters such as the placement of servers or platforms may influence the assignment of country. So, it may be mistaken to infer that one country has a bigger problem than another country.

The reports frequently calculated their own percentages, which were specifically available in the IWF and INHOPE reports alongside volume per country of reports/notices in the reporting period. In order to be able to compare percentages,

Childlight calculated the percentages for NCEMC's country level data as well as CRC's country level data which were reported as the total number of reports or IPs. The calculation formula is detailed at the end of this chapter.

Childlight then organised the countries by World Regions, according to UNICEF's Regional Office Classification. Following this approach, Childlight calculated the percentages of reports and or notices sent to each region based on the countries included in each of the reports. This calculation and included countries can be found at the end of this chapter. A further calculation of CSAM hosting rate was provided through a division of the percentages of CSAM report/notices per region by the calculated percentages of world population for the UNICEF worlds regions.

To calculate a CSAM report per region population rate, Childlight conducted a series of calculations. The first was to use United Nations data from 2023 and 2024 concerning country-level population estimates, which were grouped and added together by UNICEF region. The regional population totals were then divided by 10,000 to achieve a rate of reports/notices received per 10,000 people. This was then divided by the previously calculated total number of CSAM reports/notices for the same regions. What resulted was a table that compared total volume of CSAM reports/notices where calculable accounting for population. In addition to the calculated CSAM rate and regional proportions, Childlight will include the range of report/notice volume for the region as well as the number of countries covered (see tables at the end of this chapter).

Childlight continued to use the consolidated terminology across the six data sources found in the ITL Index 2024 which created greater harmony among the sources and enabled comparison. This also helped in understanding the genuine differences between them.

Victim Demographic Analysis

Age categories were determined by the data sources and grouped according to the age ranges available and definitions provided for each categorical label found in the reports. The first category "Infants and Toddlers" was present in two of the data sources includes children below the age of three years old. This data required some harmonisation as IWF reported the figure in terms of age ranges rather than labels and as such the data found for children appearing to be zero to two years old was labelled "Infants and Toddlers". The next category "Prepubescent" was present in three of the four groups. This category also required harmonisation as a definition of prepubescent was not provided in any of the reports. Based on the data located in IWF's report and definitions found in academic publication, the associated age range was provided as children up to the age of 13 years old. The remaining children were categorised as either "Pubescent" or in some circumstances "Post Pubescent" in the reports produced by NCMEC and INHOPE. IWF's data which provided specific age ranges was grouped by the categories for 14- and 15-year-olds as well as 16- and 17-year-olds.

Relational data, which is the documented connection/relation between the victim and their abuser, was taken from the NCMEC report for the Office Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP). This data pertains to the person who sexually abused and photographed the child or arranged for the sexual abuse of the child. The data for this can be found in its original format in the original report listed below. Childlight chose to present this data using a previously established format set by NCMEC and Thorn in a report from 2019. This report included a table which provided categories for the data presented in the OJJDP report. The categories were Nuclear Family, Extended Family, Close Proximity and Unknown to Victim. Please see Table 4 for a full breakdown of the relationships included in each. Childlight chose to covert the volumes presented in the NCMEC report into a proportional measure to match the data presentation for the other indicators for CSAM.

Content Analysis

Content removal times were included in three of the sources: INHOPE, IWF and NCMEC. This was in line with the function of these organisations, which is in part, to locate and remove CSAM as well as report its detection to law enforcement.

Reported content removal times are influenced by multiple factors which can increase the amount of time it takes for the offending content to be removed from where it was located. Connecting with the correct electronic service provider can take multiple attempts at outreach and can involve correspondence with said ESP in order to ensure the validity of the request. It remains important to note that these challenges are faced by both the reporting organisation and the company that receives the notice and cooperation between the two entities is needed.

Childlight sought to assess the platform level location of the reports/notices sent each year. For the breakdown of reports/notices by site type Childlight used the template and categories set by INHOPE and IWF in their Annual Reports. In order to be able to categorise the NCMEC reports by electronic service providers (ESP) in a similar manner Childlight obtained the typological definitions for the site types used by IWF and INHOPE. These definitions were then applied to ESP's listed in NCMEC's annual report. Due to the confidentiality of the definitions these are not able to be shared publicly.

Severity Analysis

Another area which demonstrates a variation in terminology and definition across data sources concerns the severity of acts shown in detected CSAM. Organisations either reported information based solely on what they determined to be illegal

CSAM, or on the total number of images processed. From the total numbers there appeared to be a distinction between content depicting sexually abusive CSAM which met the international illegal standard, and the content that depicted child sexual exploitation material, which may also include sexually abusive material but did not meet the international criminal standard. To harmonise definitions and categorisations across reports, terminology from the Lanzarote Convention (2007) and the Terminology Guidelines for the Protection of Children from Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse (2025) were used. According to these documents, CSAM involves the real or simulated sexually explicit conduct involving a child or the depiction of a child's sexual organs for a sexual purpose. Based upon this definition, CSAM from each of the data sources would include all material classified by the various organisations to include penetrative child sexual abuse, or a focus on a child's sexual organs. The table below shows which of each organisation's severity measures falls under the CSAM category as defined above, based largely on a global illegal threshold, and that which fell outside of this in the CSEM, harmful and exploitative category. It is important to note that in future iterations of the index we will dig deeper into these classifications with all the data owners, to think about further enhancing harmonisation, and reflecting the nuances of each organisation's image analysis.

Please find more detailed categorical information for each organisation in Appendix III.

CSAM severity classifications by organisation

Organisation	Internationally illegal CSAM	CSEM and CSAM national
Tech Coalition	A1	A2 + B1 + B2
IWF	IWF Intelligrade (Non-Penetrative Sexual Act, Penetration, Sexual Posing w nudity, Masturbation, Sadism and Bestiality)	IWF Intelligrade (Sexual display of the pubic region no nudity, inappropriate touching, adult sexual arousal)
NCMEC	CSAM	Exploitative
InHope	Illegal CSAM	N/A

Data Quality and Limitations

It should be noted that the sources of all the data were published primarily in English and from organisations in Western Europe and North America. As a result, the data may be skewed to represent primarily high-income countries and populations due to the report sources and responsibilities of the various organisations. INHOPE data represents a culmination of analysis from around the world and helps to combat this limitation. It may also be the case that CSAM distribution in middle- and low-income countries is occurring via other means, such as via phone messages or email, that are less visible to reporting agencies.

The findings and data analysis were presented to each organisation for input concerning the representation of their data to ensure accuracy. Comments from the data owners were recorded and included where appropriate. Data owners were consulted on how they wished Childlight to reference their reports in the index. Each of these organisations was invited to join a core working group for the Index and work towards future iterations of this indicator and new indicators that delve deeper into understanding the magnitude and nature of CSAM globally.

Overall volume of CSAM detected can be misleading in many ways because it is highly sensitive to a large range of factors including the mission of an organisation, which parts of the online space they cover (Electronic Service Providers, Peer2Peer, dark web), what they count (e.g. sightings which could be one image of a zip file with many images of a film etc), as well as their detection methods (crawler, targeted searches, reports from public or ESPs), etc. Thus, a drop in CSAM can actually be bad news because it might reflect new encryption technology and an increase might be good because it is due to better detection and awareness. To minimise this bias, we will show percentage breakdowns of detected CSAM rather than count only data to understand what we can learn about victims and the abuse they suffer from the nature of the abuse depicted.

The source of information for each organisation also influenced the data that the organisations presented. Each organisation collected reports of CSAM in a different manner, whether it was through public reporting, reports by electronic service providers (ESP), and data obtained by web crawlers or policing information. Whether an organisation received reports about CSAM from the public, from ESPs or law enforcement, the source influenced the amount and type of CSAM assessed. Due to the varying mandates for each organisation, their recorded and calculated data was different, as some were focused on content removal, while others have law enforcement responsibilities.

The data sources were not interrogated or researched beyond the published numbers. This posed a challenge when attempting to harmonise country level data as the organisations used various geopolitical boundaries. For the purpose of harmonisation across Childlight reports the United Nations geopolitical definitions were used and where necessary certain jurisdictions were merged to comply with this understanding. Additionally, to provide greater context to the regional and country level statistics Childlight has provided information concerning World Bank assessments of country wealth, regional population estimates (UN, 2022) as well as the Internet World Stats (2023) data on Internet users and their usage. This was in an effort to combat some of the limitations/bias presented by the regional level data, which may unfairly misrepresent countries as having greater or lesser amounts of CSAM. The hope is that the information will help to address differences in country/regional levels of internet capacity/use, infrastructure and means of addressing these crimes.

The definitions and information about the way in which data was collected and calculated regarding each source was only obtained through what was included in the reports.

In certain circumstances, smaller samples of data were used for analysis to represent the organisations larger data set. NCMEC analysed a sample of 2598 CSAM files picturing identified victims for their Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Department report.

Additional CSAM Technical Tables

TABLE 2

CSAM data organisational differences table

Source	NCMEC	IWF	INHOPE	Tech Coalition	Thorn	C3P	CRC
Hash-matching	Yes- Exact Matching	Yes- Exact Matching Yes- Exact Matching working on perceptual	Yes- Exact Matching Only	Yes – Exact Matching	Yes- Safer Perceptual	Yes- Project Arachnid	Yes – Exact Matching
Public Reporting	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes	No
Industry Reporting	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Automated detection software	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Web crawler	No	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes	No
Geographic responsibility	U.S. and International	U.K. and International	Global Hotline Network (50 Countries)	Global	U.S.	Canada and International	Global
Upload Location reported	Yes	No	No	No	No	No	Yes
Server location reported	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Takedown efforts	Yes	Limited	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Platforms as reporting source	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Limited	No
Victim request for takedown	Yes- Take it Down	Yes- Report Remove	No	No	No	Yes – Need Help Now	No

Source	NCMEC	IWF	INHOPE	Tech Co-alition	Thorn	C3P	CRC
Report-ing to LEA	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Publicly Available Data	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Limited	Limited	No
Annual Report	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	TBD	TBD	No
Founded (date)	1984	1996	1999	2006	2012	1985	2013
Funding source(s)	Major platforms, government, third sector, private individuals.	Major platforms, ISPs, government, third sector, private individuals.	NGOs, Law Enforcement Agencies, tech companies, and corporate partners.	NGOs, Law, tech companies, and corporate partners.	Major platforms, government, third sector, private individuals	NGOs, Law Enforcement Agencies, tech companies, and corporate partners.	Tech companies, Law enforcement agencies, NGOs
Legislative mandates	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes	No

TABLE 3

Table of included data for the 2025 Into the Light Index, CSAM data indicator presence by organisation

Source	NCMEC	IWF	INHOPE	Thorn	C3P	CRC
Estimat-ed Age of Victim	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes
Assessed Sex of Victim	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes
Assessed Severity Measure	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes
Hosting Location	No	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
Assessed Upload Location	Yes	No	No	No	Yes	No
Report Removal Response	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes

Source	NCMEC	IWF	INHOPE	Thorn	C3P	CRC
Offender Proximity to Victim	Yes	No	No	No	No	No
AI-Gen CSAM	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes
New vs Known	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Victim Reported Content	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	No

NCMEC identified victim relation data table

Relationship category	
Nuclear Family	Mother Father Brother Sister Half-Sibling
Extended Family	Stepmother Stepfather Aunt Uncle Grandmother Grandfather Step-Grandfather Brother-in-law Cousin Legal Guardian Other relative
Close Proximity	Babysitter/mentor/coach/teacher Boyfriend Guardian's partner Neighbour/family friend
Unknown to Victim	No relationship Online enticement/Self & Perp produced Photographer Sex-trafficker Stranger Unknown

Calculations

Calculations per Data Source

Percentages rounded to one decimal point.

National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC)

Severity calculation:

Source: 2023 Total Notifications sent by NCMEC to Responsive Electronic Service Providers (ESP) & 2023 Total Notifications sent by NCMEC to Unresponsive Electronic Service Providers (ESP)

Total Material Assessed = [Total Responsive ESPs (CSAM + Exploitative) + Total Unresponsive ESPs (CSAM + Exploitative)]= 127766
Illegal & Abusive Sexual Activity CSAM Total = {CSAM Responsive ESPs + CSAM Non-Responsive ESPs} = 121800Severity Harmful Total= [Exploitative Responsive ESPs + Exploitative Non-Responsive ESPs]= 5, 886
CSAM Internationally Illegal% = (Illegal & Abusive Sexual Activity CSAM Total / Total Material Assessed) * 100 applied: 121800/ 127766*100 = 95.2% (rounded to 1 decimal)
Severity Harmful % = Severity Harmful Total / Total Material Assessed) * 100 applied: 5, 886/127766*100= 4.8% (rounded to 1 decimal)

Victim Age:

Source: Office of Justice Programs U.S. Department of Justice CY 2023 Report to the Committees on Appropriations National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC) Transparency

Infant Toddler % = (Infant/Toddler Male Victims + Infant/Toddler Female Victims) / Grand Total * 100 applied: 84/1986*100= 0.4% (rounded to 1 decimal)
Prepubescent % = (Prepubescent Male Victims + Prepubescent Female Victims) / Grand Total * 100 applied: 680/1986*100=33.2% (rounded to 1 decimal)
Pubescent % = (Pubescent Male Victims + Pubescent Female Victims / Grand Total* 100 applied: 1,222/1986*100=61.5% (rounded to 1 decimal)

Victim Sex:

Source: Office of Justice Programs U.S. Department of Justice CY 2023 Report to the Committees on Appropriations National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC) Transparency

Female % = (Female Infant/Toddler Victims + Female Prepubescent Victims + Female Pubescent Victims / Grand Total * 100 applied: 1,312/1986*100=66.1% (rounded to 1 decimal)
Male % = (Male Infant/Toddler Victims + Male Prepubescent Victims + Male Pubescent Victims /Grand Total)* 100 applied:674/1986*100=33.9% (rounded to 1 decimal)

New/Novel vs. Known/Hashed:

Source: Office of Justice Programs U.S. Department of Justice CY 2023 Report to the Committees on Appropriations National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC) Transparency

Exact Match:

New/Novel % = CY 2023- Unique Images and Videos Determined by MD5 Hashing/ Total CY 2023 Image and Videos Files Uploaded with Cybertipline reports by ESPs
49,979,320/104, 370, 572 * 100 = 47.9 %

Known/Hashed % = (Total CY 2023 Image and Videos Files Uploaded with Cybertipline reports by ESPs - CY 2023- Unique Images and Videos Determined by MD5 Hashing)/ CY 2023 Image and Videos Files Uploaded with Cybertipline reports by ESPs
54, 391, 252/104, 370, 572 * 100 = 52.1 %

Perceptual Match
New/Novel % = CY 2023- Unique Images and Videos Determined by PhotoDNA and Videntifier Hashing/ Total CY 2023 Image and Videos Files Uploaded with Cybertipline reports by ESPs
33, 640, 168/104, 370, 572 * 100 = 32.2%

Known/Hashed % = (Total CY 2023 Image and Videos Files Uploaded with Cybertipline reports by ESPs - CY 2023- Unique Images and Videos Determined by PhotoDNA and Videntifier)/ CY 2023 Image and Videos Files Uploaded with Cybertipline reports by ESPs
70, 730, 404/ 104, 370, 572 * 100 = 67.8%

Internet Watch Foundation

Severity:

Source: Analysis of IntelliGrade hashes; sexual activity metadata

Illegal & Abusive Sexual Activity CSAM % = ([Intelligrade 2023 Volume (Non-penetrative sexual activity, Penetration, Sexual Posing with Nudity, Masturbation, Sadism or degradation and Bestiality) – Intelligrade 2022 Volume (Non-penetrative sexual activity, Penetration, Sexual Posing with Nudity, Masturbation, Sadism or degradation and Bestiality)]/ (Intelligrade 2023 Volume - Intelligrade 2022 Volume) * 100

2023 numbers: 592845/616229*100=96.2% (rounded to 1 decimal)

CSEM, Harmful and Other%= ([Intelligrade 2023 Volume (Sexual Display of Pubic Region, Inappropriate touching and Adult Sexual Arousal) – Intelligrade 2022 Volume ((Sexual Display of Pubic Region, Inappropriate touching and Adult Sexual Arousal)]/ (Intelligrade 2023 Volume - Intelligrade 2022 Volume) * 100

2023 numbers: 23 384/616229*100= 3.8% (rounded to 1 decimal)

New/Novel vs. Known/Hashed:

New/Novel % = (2023 IntelliGrade Hashes – 2022 IntelliGrade Hashes)/ 2023 IntelliGrade Hashes * 100

(2,255,390 - 1,663,106)/ 2,255,390 * 100 = 26.2%

Known/Hashed % = (2022 IntelliGrade Hashes/ 2023 IntelliGrade Hashes) * 100

1,663,106/ 2,255,390 * 100 = 73.7%

Country Proportion Formula

NCMEC:

Country Report % = (Country report # / Total # of reports to NCMEC (32059029)) * 100

CRC:

Country Report %= (# of CSAM IPs as of 31.12.23 / Total # of CSAM IPs on P2P for 31.12.23)

INHOPE:

Country Report % = (Country report # / Total # of reports to INHOPE (785, 322)) * 100

CSAM Categorisation per Organisation

INHOPE

CSAM: all media that meets the international criteria of illegal child sexual abuse material. Does not include material hosted on the TOR/dark net.

NCMEC 2023

CSAM: Content that meets the legal threshold for child sexual abuse material

Exploitative: Content that does not meet the legal definition of CSAM but depicts identified child victims

IWF: IntelliGrade Analysis

Penetration
Sexual posing with nudity
Masturbation
Sadism or degradation
Bestiality
Sexual display of the pubic region
Inappropriate touching
Adult sexual arousal

Regional Percentage Calculations

INHOPE:

East and South Africa % = (Sum of reports for South Africa + Seychelles + Mauritius / Total Number of Reports) * 100

East Asia and Pacific % = (Sum of reports for Peoples Republic of China (including Hong Kong, Macao, and Taiwan) + Thailand+ Malaysia+ Singapore + Indonesia+ South Korea+ Laos+ Vietnam+ Japan+ Cambodia + Australia + New Zealand/ Total number of Reports) * 100

Eastern Europe and Central Asia % = (Sum of reports for Albania + Armenia + Belarus + Bosnia and Herzegovina + Macedonia + Russia + Serbia + Bulgaria + Romania + Kazakhstan + Moldova + Estonia + Azerbaijan + Türkiye + Montenegro + Ukraine + Cyprus + Georgia / Total number of reports) * 100

Latin America and Caribbean % = (Sum of reports for Anguilla + Argentina + British Virgin Islands + Chile + Costa Rica + Dominica + Panama + Belize + Peru + Puerto Rico + Saint Kitts and Nevis + Brazil/ Total Number of Reports) * 100

Middle East and North Africa% = (Iran/ Total Number of Reports) * 100

Middle East and North Africa% = (Iran + Israel + Jordan + United Arab Emirates / Total Number of Reports) * 100

North America % = (Sum of reports for United States + Canada/ Total Number of Reports) * 100

South Asia %= India + Pakistan / Total number of Reports * 100

Western Europe % = (Sum of reports for Netherlands+ France + Germany + Romania + Slovakia+ Slovenia + Latvia + Iceland + Sweden + United Kingdom+ Italy + Luxembourg + Hungary + Ireland + Austria + Poland + Türkiye + Norway + Portugal + Spain + Lithuania + Czechia+ Denmark + Finland + Switzerland/Total number of reports) *100

IWF:

East and South Africa % = (Sum of reports for South Africa + Seychelles + Mauritius / Total Number of Reports) * 100

East Asia and Pacific % = (Sum of reports for Peoples Republic of China (including Hong Kong, Macao, and Taiwan) + Thailand+ Malaysia+ Singapore + Indonesia+ South Korea+ Vietnam+ Japan+ Cambodia + Australia + New Zealand/ Total number of Reports) * 100

Eastern Europe and Central Asia % = (Sum of reports for Russia + Bulgaria + Romania + Kazakhstan + Moldova + Estonia + Azerbaijan + Türkiye + Montenegro + Ukraine+ Cyprus + Georgia / Total number of reports) * 100

South Asia %= India/ Total number of Reports * 100

Western Europe % = (Sum of reports for Netherlands+ France + Germany + Romania + Slovakia+ Latvia + Iceland + Sweden + United Kingdom+ Italy + Luxembourg + Hungary + Ireland + Austria + Poland + Türkiye + Norway + Portugal + Spain + Lithuania + Czechia+ Denmark + Finland + Switzerland/Total number of reports) *100

North America % = (Sum of reports for United States + Canada/ Total Number of Reports) * 100

Latin America and Caribbean % = (Sum of reports for Panama + Brazil + Anguilla/ Total Number of Reports) * 100

Middle East and North Africa% = (Iran+ Israel + United Arab Emirates / Total Number of Reports) * 100

NCMEC:

East and South Africa % = (Sum of reports for South Africa + Seychelles + Mauritius + Angola + Botswana + Burundi + Cape Verde Islands + Comoros + Djibouti + Eretria + Ethiopia + Kenya + Lesotho + Madagascar + Malawi + Mozambique + Namibia + Rwanda + Sao Tome and Principe + South Sudan + Sudan + Swaziland + Tanzania + Uganda + Zambia + Zimbabwe / Total Number of Reports) * 100

East Asia and Pacific % = (Sum of reports for Peoples Republic of China (including Hong Kong, Macao, and Taiwan) + Thailand+ Malaysia+ Singapore + Indonesia+ South Korea+ Laos+ Vietnam+ Japan+ Cambodia + Australia + New Zealand + Brunei + Cook Islands + Federated States of Micronesia + Fiji + Guam + Kiribati + Marshall Islands + Mongolia + Myanmar + Nauru + Niue + North Korea + Palau + Papua New Guinea + Samoa + Philippines + Timor-Leste + Tokelau + Tonga + Tuvalu + Vanuatu / Total number of Reports) * 100

Eastern Europe and Central Asia % = (Sum of reports for Russia + Bulgaria + Romania + Kazakhstan + Moldova + Estonia + Azerbaijan + Türkiye + Montenegro + Ukraine + Albania + Armenia + Belarus + Bosnia and Herzegovina + Croatia + Cyprus + Georgia + Kosovo + Kyrgyzstan + Macedonia + Serbia + Tajikistan + Turkmenistan + Uzbekistan / Total number of reports) * 100

South Asia %= (India + Bhutan + Afghanistan + Bangladesh + Maldives + Nepal + Pakistan + Sri Lanka/ Total number of Reports) * 100

Western Europe % = (Sum of reports for Netherlands+ France + Germany + Romania + Slovakia+ Latvia + Iceland + Sweden + United Kingdom+ Italy + Luxembourg + Hungary + Ireland + Austria + Poland + Türkiye + Norway + Portugal + Spain + Lithuania + Czechia+ Greece + Malta + Denmark + Finland + Switzerland + Andorra + Aland Islands + Estonia + Faroe Islands + Gibraltar + Greenland + Jersey + Liechtenstein + Monaco + San Marino + Slovenia /Total number of reports) *100

North America % = (Sum of reports for United States + Canada/ Total Number of Reports) * 100

Latin America and Caribbean % = (Sum of reports for Panama + Belize + Uruguay + Chile + Brazil + Anguilla + Antigua and Barbuda + Argentina + Aruba + Bahamas + Barbados + Bermuda + Bolivia + British Virgin Islands + Colombia + Costa Rica + Cuba + Dominica + Dominican Republic + Ecuador + El Salvador + Falkland Islands + Grenada + Guatemala + Guyana + Haiti + Honduras + Jamaica + Martinique + Mexico + Monserrat + Nicaragua + Paraguay + Peru + Puerto Rico + Saint Kitts and Nevis + Saint Lucia + Saint Vincent and Grenadines + Suriname + Trinidad and Tobago + Turks and Caicos Islands + Venezuela/ Total Number of Reports) * 100

Middle East and North Africa% = (Algeria + Bahrein + Egypt + Iran + Iraq + Israel + Jordan + Kuwait + Lebanon + Libya + Morocco + Oman + Palestinian Territory + Qatar + Saudi Arabia + Syria + Tunisia + United Arab Emirates + Yemen Arab Republic/ Total Number of Reports) * 100

West And Central Africa%= (Benin + Burkina Faso + Cameroon + Central African Republic + Chad + Congo + Cote d'Ivoire + Democratic Republic of Congo + Equatorial Guinea + Gabon + Ghana + Guinea + Guinea-Bissau + Liberia + Mali + Mauritania + Niger + Nigeria + Senegal + Sierra Leone + Togo/ Total Number of Reports) * 100

UNICEF Region CSAM Rate Calculation

(Sum of reports from INHOPE and NCMEC)/ (Regional Population/10000)

1. East Asia and Pacific: (6787125)/ (2456588362/10000)=
2. Eastern Europe and Central Asia: (2079419)/(428618656/10000)
3. Eastern and Southern Africa: (397034)/(644026582/10000)
4. Latin America and Caribbean: (3121975)/(657673959/10000)
5. Middle East and North Africa: (5210808)/(506808156/10000)
6. North America: (1401202)/(382776439/10000)
7. South Asia: (13863711)/(1952474453/10000)
8. Western and Central Africa: (485138)/(609752689/10000)
9. Western Europe: (1768042)/(472250211/10000)

Country CSAM Rate Formula

(Sum of reports from INHOPE and NCMEC)/ (Country Population/10000)

Netherlands, France, Germany, Slovakia, Latvia, Iceland, Sweden, United Kingdom, Italy, Luxembourg, Hungary, Ireland, Austria, Poland, Türkiye, Norway, Portugal, Spain, Lithuania, Czechia, Greece, Malta, Denmark, Finland, Switzerland, Andorra, Aland Islands, Estonia, Faroe Islands, Gibraltar, Greenland, Jersey, Liechtenstein, Belgium, Monaco, San Marino, Slovenia

India, Bhutan, Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, Sri Lanka

Link to Registered Protocol: https://osf.io/m38h7

Ethics Approval: Approved by the Childlight Research Ethics Sub-Committee (CRESC) at the University of Edinburgh, Reference CSAMGI-JST-171224CL

AI Disclosure Statement: No AI tools were used in the course of this indicator area work.

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PART 2

Offline Victimisation Surveys Indicator Area

The prevalence of people experiencing rape or sexual assault before the age of 18, was assessed through a systematic review that aimed to bring together results from large national studies and regional surveys that captured these types of abuse. Studies were only included if they were representative at the national or sub-national level. The definitions used for rape of a child and sexual assault of a child follow the operational categories set out in UNICEF's International Classification of Violence against Children (UNICEF, 2023a), which distinguishes rape as penetration (vaginal, anal, or oral) and sexual assault as non-penetrative sexual acts, such as unwanted touching or coercive sexual contact. Data was extracted from publications between 2010 and 2024 of representative surveys involving both adults recalling their experiences as children and children reporting their experiences directly. The studies included in the review employed a variety of measurement tools to capture instances of offline CSEA. However, these tools often did not disaggregate data by specific subtypes of offline CSEA (i.e., rape or sexual assault). This led to three distinct categories; rape, sexual assault and, in instances where it was unclear which of the two subtypes were being reported, the third category captured either rape or sexual assault. For example, a common question used in adverse childhood experiences (ACE) questionnaires asks "Did an adult person at least 5 years older than you ever... touch or fondle you or have you touch their body in a sexual way or attempt or actually have oral, anal, or vaginal intercourse with you?"

Where possible, data related to the perpetration of rape or sexual assault were extracted and analysed across three main perpetrator categories: strangers, peers and family members. Most available data related to familial perpetrators and, within this group, distinctions could be made between rape and sexual assault subtypes. In contrast, there was a paucity of peer- and stranger-related data disaggregated by these types of abuse.

The Prevalence of Offline CSEA Victimisation - Technical Note

Lu, M., Anderson, N., Fry, D., Baksh, A., Lamond, M., & Page, S.

Introduction

Offline child sexual exploitation and abuse (CSEA) refers to sexually exploitative or abusive behaviours against children that occur in physical, non-digital contexts. Accurately estimating the scale and nature of offline CSEA remains a critical challenge due to the sensitive and hidden nature of the abuse, stigma surrounding disclosure, and variation in data collection across countries and regions. The following systematic review and meta-analysis aimed to address the current gap in our understanding of the prevalence of offline CSEA within the regional and country levels of South Asia and Western Europe. This work complements other data activities that were conducted for Childlight's Global Index, including prevalence estimates of technology-facilitated CSEA victimisation, administrative data related to CSEA and scale and nature of child sexual abuse material (CSAM). Geographic Focus: West Europe and South Asia

For the prevalence of offline CSEA victimisation indicators, the focus was on West Europe and South Asia only. The primary rationale for disaggregating the data for specific countries and regions was that it allowed for easier global comparisons, highlighting differences in reporting and prevalence levels that could aid in policy and targeted interventions for specific areas.

The Global Index in 2024 highlighted widespread technology-facilitated CSEA globally, but Western Europe reported some of the highest prevalence rates for non-consensual sharing of sexual images and online solicitation (Fry et al., 2024). Western Europe also faces ongoing challenges with offline CSEA, particularly involving peer-on-peer abuse and familial abuse. In this region, the cultural and legal frameworks around child protection are more developed, but underreporting remains an issue, especially regarding familial abuse, which often goes unnoticed due to secrecy and fear of stigma (Quayle, 2020). Moreover, despite relatively strong legal frameworks and well-developed child protection systems in West Europe, the persistence of 'offline' CSEA reveals critical areas that still require attention. The region's vast work on online risks has been significant, yet there is still an ongoing threat posed by 'offline' abuse, particularly in family and peer settings (Quayle, 2020).

At the time of the study, South Asia had less survey data than other regions, despite being identified in the Global Index 2024 as a hotspot for CSAM, signaling a critical need for improved data collection in the region (Fry et al., 2024). The region faces significant challenges due to socio-cultural norms that often discourage reporting,

particularly in cases involving family members (ECPAT, 2018). Familial abuse may be underreported due to taboos around discussing sexual matters, victim-blaming, and a lack of robust child protection services (ECPAT, 2018). Moreover, the caste system found in specific countries, gender discrimination, and high levels of poverty exacerbate vulnerabilities, making children more susceptible to exploitation by both strangers and peers (Schwartz, 2023). The scarcity of data from South Asia, compared to other global regions, signals a critical need for improved data collection and targeted research efforts to understand the scope of offline CSEA in this region. In South Asia, the challenges were compounded by limited access to support services, and a lack of comprehensive data. The findings from this systematic review and meta-analysis will be instrumental in advocating for improved data collection practices, raising awareness, and driving policy reforms. For South Asia, establishing stronger child protection networks and addressing taboos around sexual abuse are urgent steps toward reducing CSEA in both rural and urban contexts.

Childlight is engaged in several prevalence estimation efforts in this area including producing joint estimates with Together for Girls, CDC and WHO that expand on these estimates methodologically. These prevalence estimate initiatives, whether by Childlight or partners, are important for improving the data landscape for understanding different types of CSEA across countries, regions and globally. As these new estimates emerge, Childlight will continue to compile and report the latest evidence in our Index for use by policymakers and key decisionmakers.

Perpetrator Focus

Due to the lack of evidence on perpetration type in CSEA, most research has typically focused on capturing the prevalence estimates of survivors of CSEA and their characteristics (Mathews et al, 2024). Understanding the types of perpetrators in child sexual abuse - whether familial, peer, or stranger - is crucial for targeted interventions as each perpetrator category presents unique challenges and requires different approaches for effective prevention and treatment (Seto et al., 2015).

The variations of CSEA perpetrators highlight the importance of disaggregating data by perpetrator type to inform more effective policy and intervention efforts. As such, the systematic review and meta-analysis's specific focus includes offline CSEA by perpetrator type including peer, family, and strangers where data are available. These findings aim to improve understanding of the diverse nature of CSEA and support the development of more nuanced and effective responses to CSEA.

CSEA perpetrated by peers

Peer on peer sexual abuse research is a growing field, and recent research has suggested an increasing number of situations where children were involved as both victims and perpetrators (Tener & Katz, 2021). A recent nationally representative

survey in Australia investigated child sexual abuse by perpetrator type, finding the highest perpetrator type was "other known adolescents (non-romantic)" representing 10%. Adolescents (current/former romantic partners) represented 2.5% of perpetrators and unknown adolescent perpetrators represented 1.4% (Mathews et al., 2024). A prevalence study conducted in the Nordic countries found an increase in peer-on-peer abuse with the findings indicating a heightened risk of abuse starting in early adolescence, with peers representing the largest group of perpetrators during this stage (Kloppen et al.,2016). Tener and Katz's (2019) systematic review on peer sexual abuse found that most of the studies focused on peer sexual harassment definitions, rather than more serious forms of sexual abuse. The findings varied, often showing inconsistent results depending on the ages and genders of the peers involved. Together these studies highlight the need for specific peer- perpetrator types (i.e., known, romantic/dating, or unknown), and accounting for more serious forms of abuse for developing targeted prevention, early intervention, and effective support strategies to reduce peer-related sexual abuse.

CSEA perpetrated by family members

Familial child sexual abuse is a significant social and health issue with family members estimated to be responsible for up to one-third of child sexual abuse cases, with fathers and stepfathers being the most common offenders in these intrafamilial context (Richards, 2011; Seto et al., 1999; Seto et al, 2015). Despite this, many cases go undetected as children may fear their abuser, not want to cause trouble within their family, feel the abuse is their fault, or fail to recognise the abuse (Scott, 2023). Familial child sexual abuse is unique and often considered puzzling from a scientific and clinical perspective given familial offenders typically do not exhibit antisocial tendencies or unusual sexual interests (Seto et al., 2015). Additionally, biologically, the phenomena of incest avoidance were widely accepted, yet familial child abuse continues to occur indicating factors override this innate or learned mechanism (Leavitt, 2005). Abuse by a family member, especially a parent, can be traumatic due to betrayal, stigma, and secrecy (Scott, 2023). Despite these implications, familial CSEA remains underrepresented in prevalence research and many studies do not disaggregate data in a way that highlights the characteristics and impacts of familial CSEA. Therefore, focusing on understanding the prevalence and characteristics of familial CSEA is essential to fully understand the scope of the issue, inform child protection policy, and ultimately improving efforts to safeguard children.

CSEA perpetrated by strangers

While less common than familial CSEA, CSEA perpetrated by strangers presents unique challenges and differs from CSEA perpetrated by other types of perpetrators in terms of dynamics and context. A study with 2,420 elementary and high school students aged 9-16 years old in North-West England reported that 6.7% of children 9-16 had experienced an attempted and completed CSA and abduction by a stranger (Gallagher et al., 2008). Most of perpetrators were males and adults acting on their own and incidents usually took place when victims were with other children and when they are outside.

Despite public perception often focusing on 'stranger danger,' existing evidence and prevention strategies have focused more on CSEA by known individuals. As a result, less is known about the nuanced contexts in which stranger-perpetrated CSEA take places. Therefore, understanding the prevalence of by strangers is not only important for balanced understanding across all perpetrator types but also crucial for developing targeted interventions and ensuring that all potential risks to children's safety are addressed.

Importance of the current review

By analysing and synthesising existing literature, this systematic review and meta-analysis provided crucial evidence that could inform policy making and practice regarding the prevention of and response to CSEA. The findings of this review will be of great significance to policymakers, practitioners, advocates and researchers, as they can use the findings to make informed decisions about allocating resources and designing effective prevention and response programmes. Moreover, the review will contribute to the advancement of knowledge on CSEA prevalence, shed light on perpetration, and thus, assist in the development of future research in this field. Additionally, this year's review will set the benchmark to be replicated for other regions in subsequent years. Ultimately, the findings from this systematic review and meta-analysis have the potential to make a significant impact in reducing the incidence of CSEA and promoting the health and wellbeing of children globally.

The results of this review have the potential to not only improve the global understanding of "offline" CSEA but also to inspire meaningful policy changes and interventions that will protect children in diverse socio-cultural contexts.

This technical note outlined the methodology and analytical framework used to develop global estimates of offline CSEA. It provides a summary of the methods used for data collection, cleaning, risk of bias assessment, and statistical analysis.

Data Collection

A comprehensive systematic review was conducted and focused on offline CSEA globally, regionally, and country-level in the West Europe and South Asia regions. This review searched both academic and grey literature to identify studies that had published prevalence estimates on any type of offline CSEA aligned with UNICEF's International Classification of Violence Against Children (ICVAC), including rape, sexual assault, non-contact sexual violence, and sexual exploitation occurring in physical (non-digital) contexts (see Conceptual Framework for more information).

In addition to reviewing newly published literature, this review also examined previous scoping and systematic reviews carried out by the research team, including

a global review on prevalence estimation methods for child sexual abuse, and prior research on general child sexual violence prevalence studies in both high- and low-resource settings (Fry et al., 2025 ; Fry et al., 2024). This was especially relevant for including studies that had reported on offline forms of CSEA, disaggregated by perpetrator types (e.g., peer, family member, or stranger) and using acts-based measurement tools aligned with UNICEF's International Classification of Violence Against Children (ICVAC).

Finally, a consultation with regional experts from West Europe and South Asia was conducted to enrich the data collection process. We consulted stakeholders from 30 countries in the Western Europe UNICEF region (with responses received from 23), and from 6 countries in the South Asia UNICEF region (with responses from 4). The individuals consulted were mid-career or senior-level professionals working in government, academia, civil society, or frontline practice at the country or regional level, with expertise in CSEA research, prevention, or response. They were provided with a list of studies and asked to identify any additional published or accessible papers or data sources that include specific data or questions on the prevalence of CSEA.

Search strategy

The review updated a previous systematic effort that had identified relevant studies published between January 1st 2010 and September 30th 2023. The current update covered the period from October 1st, 2023, to December 31st, 2024, and included both peer-reviewed publications and grey literature. The research team searched the following academic databases for journal articles/reports that met the inclusion criteria:

- PubMed/Medline (ovid),
- Global Health (ovid),
- PsycINFO (ovid),
- EMBASE (ovid),
- Social science citation index (Web of Science),
- Sociological abstracts (Proquest),
- CINAHL (EBSCOhost),
- ERIC (EBSCOhost)

In addition, using the same search terms, relevant articles were selected from the following journals that are key in the field of child protection: 'Child Abuse and Neglect', 'Child Maltreatment', 'Child Abuse Review', and 'Journal of Interpersonal Violence'. Relevant systematic review bibliographies were also searched. Moreover, the search terms were used in Google Scholar and Google Search to identify previous reviews. Within these reviews, relevant references from their bibliographies were chosen and added to a systematic review management software Covidence (Veritas Health Innovation, Melbourne, Australia) for review.

Grey literature was searched through the university library databases, specifically designed to identify unpublished or non-standard academic literature. Key grey literature sources included research by international non-governmental organisations (INGOs), UN agencies and community-based organisations (CBOs), as well as research reports from national government sources. A thorough scan of key websites that publish CSEA studies was completed. This scan helped identify both grey literature and organisations/individuals that might have links to grey literature. These websites included but were not limited to:

- Child Rights International Network (www.crin.org/bcn)
- Child Rescue Coalition (CRC)
- Canadian Centre for Child Protection (C3P)
- Thorn v. International Development Research Centre (IDRC)
- Save the Children-Resource Center
- International Society for the Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect (ISPCAN)
- National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC)
- International Center for Missing and Exploited Children (ICMEC)
- WeProtect Global Alliance
- INHOPE
- End Child Prostitution and Trafficking (ECPAT)
- National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC)
- Missing Children Europe (MCE)
- www.unicef-irc.org and other UNICEF websites
- Sexual Violence Research Initiative (SVRI) search by region: https://www.svri.org/
- World Health Organization (WHO), WHO's own violence prevention publications: https://www.who.int/violence_injury_prevention/publications/violence/en/; and the WHO's V-Info website search under countries: https://apps.who.int/violence-info/countries.
- Together for Girls
- The Global Partnership to End Violence Against Children's Knowledge Platform: https://www.end-violence.org/knowledge

UNICEF Regional Offices: search bars on the following websites

- Middle East and North Africa (MENA): https://www.unicef.org/mena/
- Latin America and the Caribbean Regional Office (LACRO): https://www.unicef.org/lac/en
- West and Central Africa Regional Office (WCARO): https://www.unicef.org/topics/wcaro
- East and Southern Africa Regional Office (ESARO): https://www.unicef.org/topics/esaro,
- East Asia and Pacific Regional Office (EAPRO): https://www.unicef.org/eap/
- Regional Office of South Asia (ROSA): https://www.unicef.org/rosa/
- Europe and Central Asia (ECA): https://www.unicef.org/eca/

In addition, the research team searched for comparable data on the prevalence of offline CSEA published in:

- Demographic Health Surveys (DHS)
- Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys (MICS)
- Global School-Based Health Surveys (GSHS)
- Health Behaviour in School-aged Children Study (HBSC)
- Disrupting Harm (DH)
- Global Kids Online (GKO)
- Violence Against Children Survey (VACS)

To ensure comprehensive regional representation - particularly for South Asia and Western Europe, which were priority regions for this review - additional database searches were conducted using language filters and regional platforms. In addition, AI tools were used to help identify relevant language-specific databases for inclusion. The team applied language-based filters in major academic databases (e.g., Web of Science, PubMed, PsycINFO, EMBASE, and CINAHL) to identify publications in Spanish, French, German, Portuguese, and other languages relevant to these regions. Where formal filters were unavailable, results were sorted manually by language. Regional repositories such as BASE, REDIB, Cairn.info, RERO DOC, DNB, Dialnet, and national journal platforms for South Asian countries such as NepJOL, BanglaJOL, SLJOL were also searched. These targeted searches aimed to capture non-English studies that might otherwise be missed and to expand inclusion of culturally and geographically diverse sources on offline CSEA prevalence. Tables 4 and 5 include details of language specific academic databases searched.

Academic databases (multilingual, relevant to South Asia and Western Europe)

Database	Languages identified
Web of Science	Spanish, German, French, Turkish, Portuguese, Russian
PsycINFO (Ovid)	German, French, Spanish
PubMed/Medline (Ovid)	Dutch, Finnish, French, German, Italian, Norwegian, Portuguese, Spanish, Swedish
EMBASE	Spanish, French
Global Health (Ovid)	Chinese (only 1 found); checked for non-English entries
CINAHL (EBSCOhost)	Spanish, Chinese, Turkish, French, Portuguese, Japanese
ERIC (EBSCOhost)	Chinese, Turkish, Portuguese

TABLE 6

Regional/language-specific platforms

Database	Languages identified
BASE (Bielefeld Academic Search Engine)	Spanish, Portuguese, French, German
RERO DOC (Swiss academic portal)	French, German, Italian
Cairn.info	French
DNB (Deutsche Nationalbibliothek)	German
Dialnet	French
REDIB (Red Iberoamericana)	Spanish, Portuguese
NepJOL, BanglaJOL, SLJOL	Nepali, Bangla, Sinhala (South Asia)

Search Terms

The search strategy was designed to capture studies reporting on a broad range of child sexual victimisation, including both technology-facilitated and offline forms, to ensure no relevant data on offline CSEA were missed. This inclusive approach enabled the identification of studies that may not have focused exclusively on offline CSEA but nonetheless reported prevalence estimates for relevant subtypes. This strategy was used to maximise efficiency and minimise omission errors in the context of a large and complex global review. Search terms specifically targeting offline CSEA were informed by the research team's experience conducting previous systematic and scoping reviews in this area. A full list of search terms used is presented in Table 6.

TABLE 7 Full list of search terms used in the review

Line		Search terms
1		child* OR adolescen* OR infant* OR young* OR youth* OR teen* OR juvenile* OR minor* OR toddler* OR student* OR pre-pubert* OR prepubescen* OR newborn* OR baby OR babies OR preschool* OR kid* OR puberty OR minors* OR underag* OR preadolesc* OR preteen* OR “pre-teen” OR boy* OR girl*
2	AND	Rape OR “vaginal penetration” OR “anal penetration” OR “object penetration” OR “physically forced rape” OR “pressured rape” OR “coerced rape” OR “drug-facilitated rape” OR “alcohol-facilitated rape” OR “non-consensual sex* penetration” OR “gang-perpetrated rape” OR “attempted rape” OR molest* OR incest OR "unwanted touching" OR "unwanted sex*" OR "sexual coerc*" OR "pressured sex" OR "sexual intimate partner violence" OR "sexual gender-based violence" OR "sexual harassment" OR "harmful sexual behavio*" OR grooming OR "revenge porn*" OR "child porn*" OR "non-consensual porn*" OR "sexual assault" OR “sex* talk*” OR solicitation OR sextortion OR “sex* extortion” OR “sex* blackmail” OR “sex* act*” OR “sex* stalking” OR "sexual exploitation" OR "sexual offense*" OR "sexual violence" OR "sexual abuse" OR "sexual aggression" OR "sexual maltreatment" OR "sexual trauma" OR "sexual crime" OR "forced sex*" OR “commercial sex* exploit*” OR CSE OR CSEC OR PAPS OR “peer sex* abuse” OR “domestic sex* traffick*” OR “sex* exploit*” OR “sex* traffick*” OR "sexual bullying" OR “unwanted sex* taunts” OR “unwanted sex* comments” OR “sex* exposure” OR “sex* organ exposure” OR “unwanted groping” OR “unwanted fondling” OR “sex* stalking”
3	AND	epidemiolog* OR prevalence OR proportion OR rate OR incidence OR occur* OR magnitude OR scale OR percent* OR count OR frequen* OR degree OR measure* OR “network scale-up” OR nsum OR “household survey*” OR “prevalence estimate*” OR “respondent-driven sampling*” OR rds OR “link tracing sampling” OR “time location sampling” OR tls OR “time space sampling” OR “venue based sampling” OR “multiple systems estimation” OR mse OR “capture recapture” OR “petersen-lincoln*” OR crt OR m-nsum OR g-nsum OR s-pps OR “sampling proportionate to size”
6		1 AND 2 AND 3 AND 4

The search terms were developed following a scoping review and a series of pilot searches. Piloting of the search strategy helped refine and identify the combinations of terms that returned the most relevant studies related to offline CSEA. In addition, literature on offline CSEA was reviewed to examine the terminology most commonly used by researchers and practitioners in the field. The final list of search terms was deliberately broad and inclusive, reflecting the wide range of terms used across studies and the ongoing lack of consensus in the conceptualisation and typology of offline CSEA. This inclusive approach was necessary to capture the diversity of definitions and behavioural indicators used in existing prevalence research.

Inclusion/Exclusion Criteria

Inclusion criteria:

- The study is published in English between October 1st 2023, and December 31st 2024.
- The study reports the prevalence of offline CSEA or is an article that includes prevalence data on offline CSEA.
- The data are based on general population, which refers to samples that are representative at the national or sub-national level.
- The study includes prevalence estimates collected using traditional sampling and survey methods (e.g., cohort, cross-sectional, administrative data, and random, stratified and cluster methods).
- Only acts-based measures of CSEA were included. This systematic review categorises CSEA acts according to the definition of UNICEF and uses the authors' definitions when extracting other unspecified acts and notes the different definitions used and the diversity of acts covered to define them. Specific focus to behaviours related to rape, sexual assault, and 'offline" con-contact sexual violence as listed in ICVAC. However other subtypes may be collected and analysed.
- CSEA needs to occur in childhood (under 18 years old). It could be self-reported either by a child/an adult or others in a position of responsibility (e.g., teachers, medical doctors, social workers).
- The total study sample size needs to be at least 100 respondents.

Inclusion criteria:

- CSEA not occurring in childhood, e.g., elder abuse, sexual violence against pregnant women.
- Estimates from particular sub-populations that might not generalise to the population, e.g., children with disabilities; individuals with a history of criminal behaviour, offenders, or those currently incarcerated; LGBT population; children who are refugees or migrants; homeless or street children; children living in foster homes, group homes, or other forms of substitute care; denominator is victims of CSEA (prevalence = 100%); children in monasteries or wartime settings.

- Studies with limited sample size/selected samples, e.g., sample size <100, case studies, control studies/randomised control trials, studies using convenience or snowball sampling, or qualitative studies.
- Other types of violence: physical violence, emotional violence and neglect.

Data screening and selection

The screening management for grey literature, as well as online published reports and statistics were stored in SharePoint (Microsoft Corporation, Redmond, Washington, USA). The Covidence systematic review software (Veritas Health Innovation, Melbourne, Australia) was used to compile relevant peer-reviewed sources. Duplicate entries were removed. Two team members screened databases, searched results, titles, and abstracts to identify existing sources regarding measuring the prevalence and nature of offline CSEA, collaborating with other team members for guidance and confirmation. Following the initial screening selection, two reviewers thoroughly assessed the full texts of peer-reviewed articles, grey literature, and online published Offline CSEA monitoring data to determine their alignment with the inclusion criteria for the review. Inter-rater reliability for the full-text screening process was assessed using Cohen's Kappa, which demonstrated moderate agreement between reviewers ($\kappa = 0.48$). Any sources that failed to meet the inclusion criteria were excluded, and the reasons for such exclusions were documented and recorded in Covidence. In the event of disagreements among team members, efforts were made to reach a resolution through discussion. However, if consensus could not be achieved, an additional team member was brought in for consultation. The search strategy along with the selection processes was documented and reported in the final systematic review.

Data extraction

A comprehensive training on data extraction was conducted in January 2025. The research team extracted data based on key publication/research information into Excel. The preliminary data extraction tool was refined and updated as required during the data extraction process. The team improved the extraction tool by conducting a pilot test of the data extraction process, using previously identified sources to ensure that the specificities of the data and methodologies used were effectively captured, the team defined variables in separate spreadsheet tabs. Two reviewers extracted the data from included sources. Any disagreements between the two reviewers – regarding magnitude and nature measurements, data interpretation, contextual considerations, study methods, key findings relevant to the review questions, or variable definitions – was thoroughly discussed until a consensus was reached. If a consensus could not be achieved, the final decision was made by a third member of the team.

A master excel file was created of all the studies and extracting key information:

- Authors & Year & Title
- Sample Population (e.g., general or special)

- National Representative or Not (e.g., national representative, subnational representative, non-representative)
- Country(ies)
- Study Type (e.g., cohort, longitudinal, cross-sectional, case-control)
- Urbanicity Type (e.g., urban, rural, suburban, peri-urban, mixed)
- Sampling Method
- Survey Site (e.g., community-based, school-based, university-based, hospital or clinic-based, web-based)
- Sample Details & Data Collection Year
- Perpetrator Type & Perpetrator Age & Perpetrator Sex
- Types of Offline CSEA (e.g., contact OCSEA, non-contact OCSEA, online sexual exploitation)
- Subtypes of Offline CSEA (e.g., Rape, sexual assault, non-contact, sexual exploitation)
- Frequency of the offline CSEA
- Sex of Sample & Sample Size & Response Rate
- Prevalence (%) for each type and subtype of offline CSEA & Number of Cases for each type and subtype of offline CSEA
- Weighted or Unweighted Prevalence
- Variance & Standard Error & Confidence Interval (CI) of Prevalence
- Location of CSEA event (e.g., home, community, hospital, online, other)
- Respondent Type (e.g., children, parents report, adults recall) & Respondent Age
- Time Period for Violence Measurement (e.g., past year, lifetime)
- Age of offline CSEA Experiences & Age of Onset for CSEA (Child Sexual Exploitation and Abuse)
- Self-administered or Not (e.g., self-administered online, self-facilitated ACASI, interview-facilitated ACASI, interview-administered questionnaire)
- Measurement Instrument & Number of Questions Asked
- Type of Publication

This information was used and extracted further into a dataframe to inform design of the global map and graphics used as part of the visualisation of the ITL Index 2025. This dataframe has been made publicly available on the website in tabular format and the dataset for this Indicator Area is also available as part of our transparency, quality and reproducibility approach to data at Childlight.

Risk of bias assessment

We adapted the checklist of Hoy et al. (2012) for assessing risk of bias in prevalence studies. This checklist has nine questions with two standard answer options (high/low risk of bias):

External validity:

- Was the study's target population a close representation of the national population in relation to relevant variables?
- Was the sampling frame a true or close representation of the target population?
- Was some form of random selection used to select the sample, OR was a census undertaken?
- Was the likelihood of nonresponse bias minimal?

Internal validity:

- Were data collected directly from the subjects (as opposed to a proxy)?
- Was an acceptable case definition used in the study?
- Was the study instrument that measured the parameter of interest shown to have validity, reliability, and cultural sensitivity?
- Was the same mode of data collection used for all subjects?
- Were the numerator(s) and denominator(s) for the parameter of interest appropriate?

The final overall appraisal takes into account the answers to the above checklist questions and the summary can have two answer options (low/high risk of bias), based on the rater's judgment. Response options for the summary assessment were low, moderate, or high risk of bias.

The study methods and findings from the systematic review were reported in line with the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic reviews and Meta-Analyses extension for Systematic Reviews (PRISMA; Page et al., 2021).

Data Preparation and Conceptual Framework

This section explains how the systematic review data were organised and categorised for the victimisation indicators.

Data Cleaning

Before analyses, data quality checks and cleaning were conducted to identify potential errors or incorrect figures entered during data collation, validate and standardise key variables needed for analysis, exclude any duplicated studies, and remove any studies which did meet the final inclusion criteria. Data collected during this review were combined with records from previous systematic efforts to produce updated and current victimisation indicators. All these records were combined in one file for further checks and data cleaning process.

The data cleaning process was conducted in R Studio. The following steps were undertaken to prepare the data for meta-analysis:

- Filtering the extracted records by outcomes reported. At this stage, only data for subtypes of offline CSEA from South Asia and West Europe were included in the dataset.
- Removing studies and research reports that used non-representative samples or representativeness could not be verified.
- Selecting overall or offline CSEA subtype prevalence (where no overall offline CSEA estimate reported) scores for the full sample rather than breakdowns by different age-ranges or by perpetrator characteristics.
- Identifying studies that did not meet the inclusion criteria (e.g., control study/randomised control trials; non-disaggregated data for mixed samples of respondents; perpetrator-centric; data disaggregated by gender identity or sexual orientation and no overall prevalence for the full sample provided; no country-level breakdown; no analytical sample size data; samples exclusively comprised of victims/survivors of offline CSEA).
- Removing studies which used the same sample population, data sources, or outcomes published in other sources included in the review.
- Studies were grouped by two main recall periods: a) lifetime (including 'lifetime ever/before' for respondents <18 years of age; 'lifetime before 16' or lifetime before 18' for adult respondents) and b) past year (including 'during the COVID-19 outbreak', 'past 30 days', 'past 3 months', 'past 6 months', 'past 12 months').
- Excluding studies that did not provide prevalence estimates.

Overall offline CSEA prevalence estimates were calculated by the research team where data were provided by gender breakdown only (provided the numbers of cases were reported). Studies were grouped by two recall periods: a) past year experience (e.g., 30 days, three months, six months, 12 months, and Covid period categories combined); and b) lifetime experience (e.g., ever, before, pre-18, pre-16 categories combined).

Conceptual Framework

For the analysis, results were grouped according to the measured outcomes of offline CSEA. The conceptual framework included four main subtypes of offline CSEA developed by the guidelines listed below, which collectively reflect the spectrum of acts-based abuse that occur in physical, non-digital contexts:

- Classifications found within the included studies
- The UNICEF International Classification of Violence Against Children (ICVAC, 2024)
- Definitions adopted by leading child protection frameworks and previous global reviews of child sexual abuse prevalence

TABLE 8

Offline CSEA subtypes

Childhood sexual violence

Definition: Any deliberate, unwanted and non-essential sexual act, either completed or attempted, that is perpetrated against a child, including for exploitative purposes, and that results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury, pain or psychological suffering.

Rape of a child Definition: Vaginal, anal or oral penetration of a sexual nature of the body of a child with any bodily part or object, with or without the use of force and without consent because the child is too young to consent or consent is not given.	**Illustrative examples:** physically forced rape; pressured or coerced rape; drug- and/or alcohol-facilitated rape; non-consensual sexual penetration without physical force or threat; incest involving a child; rape in the context of armed conflict; gang-perpetrated rape **Exclusions:** apply all inclusions listed under sexual assault of a child; non-contact sexual acts against a child; torture
Sexual assault of a child Definition: Touching the private parts of a child or making a child touch the private parts of someone else (not including penetration), with or without the use of force and without consent because the child is too young to consent or consent is not given.	**Illustrative examples:** unwanted groping, fondling or other touching; sexual acts (other than penetration) forced by money; sexual acts (other than penetration) obtained through threats of physical violence; sexual acts (other than penetration) obtained through threats to the well-being of family members; use of force or coercion to obtain unwanted sexual acts or any sexual activity that the child finds degrading or humiliating; pulling a child's clothing up or down to reveal intimate areas **Exclusions:** apply all inclusions listed under rape of a child, noncontact sexual acts against a child, OCSEA
Non-contact sexual acts against a child Definition: Any form of verbal or non-verbal non-physical conduct, whether isolated or persistent, that involves unwanted reference to the body, sexual organs or sexuality of the child.	**Illustrative examples:** sexual harassment, threat of a sexual nature; exposure of a child to sexual abuse and pornography; sexual grooming, including sexual bullying and/or unwanted sexual jokes, taunts or comments; exposing of sexual organs; trapping a child and subjecting him/her to sexual advances; subjecting a child to sexual rumours; persistent leering looks; stalking of a sexual nature; sexual extortion, coercing and blackmailing a child for sexual purposes; **Exclusions:** apply all inclusions listed under rape of a child; sexual assault of a child, ICT mediated sexual abuse or exploitation.
Other acts of sexual violence against a child not elsewhere classified Definition: Acts of sexual violence not described in categories.	**Exclusions:** apply all exclusions listed in above

The review also included the sexual exploitation of children, adopting the United Nations' definition of sexual exploitation. While this definition is not exclusively related to children, it is outlined as follows: "Any actual or attempted abuse of a position of vulnerability, differential power, or trust, for sexual purposes, including but not limited to, profiting monetarily, socially or politically from the sexual exploitation of another".

Each subtype of violence was also analysed by perpetrator type where data were available:

- Family members
- Strangers
- Peers

This framework allowed all included studies to be mapped into one or more of the defined categories, ensuring alignment with acts-based prevalence estimation and enhancing comparability across diverse data sources. The cross-classification by subtype and perpetrator provided a structure for disaggregating results in a way that reflects the distinct dynamics of abuse in different relational contexts.

Unlike technology-facilitated CSEA frameworks, this offline typology did not include forms of digital harm (e.g., image-based abuse, sextortion), though future iterations of the Index may consider additional typologies to reflect evolving forms of offline abuse (e.g., abuse in institutional settings, trafficking). The current framework prioritised feasibility of classification across the existing evidence base and strategic alignment with Childlight's prevalence monitoring goals.

CSEA Subtype

While data relating to various CSEA subtypes listed in the conceptual framework were originally extracted, many studies reported only an overall CSEA prevalence estimate, without disaggregating between specific forms of CSEA - such as rape, sexual assault, and non-contact experiences (e.g., exposure, verbal harassment, or threats). This lack of disaggregation is significant because it limits the ability to distinguish between qualitatively different experiences of abuse, which may vary in impact, required interventions, and legal definitions.

Moreover, 'non-contact' CSEA remains under-researched, and in several studies, it was either not separately reported or was aggregated together with technology-facilitated forms of abuse. As a result, these studies do not provide a granular or accurate measure of offline non-contact CSEA. Therefore, the prevalence estimates focused primarily on the victimisation of rape and sexual assault. Where possible, these outcomes were disaggregated, but in many cases, studies combined both forms into a single category, resulting in an overall measure of rape and/or sexual abuse rather than distinct estimates for each type.

Overview of Findings

In summary, a total of 80 studies (76 in English, two in Norwegian, one in Polish and one in Slovenian) from Western Europe and 9 studies from South Asia were included to provide country-level characteristics. All studies were representative at either the national or sub-national level and employed a variety of data collection methods across general population samples. Measurements of CSEA drew on validated instruments, including the Juvenile Victimization Questionnaire (JVQ), the ISPCAN Child Abuse Screening Tool (ICAST), and Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) questionnaires. Several studies also utilised data from large-scale surveys, such as the Violence Against Children Surveys (VACS) and the Health Behaviour in School-aged Children Study (HBSC).

In addition, a number of country-specific surveys contributed valuable data, including the Millennium Cohort Study (MCS) and the Avon Longitudinal Study of Parents and Children (ALSPAC) from the United Kingdom, the UBS Optimus Study from Switzerland, and the Polish National Survey on Child Abuse and Neglect. These diverse sources provided a broad base of evidence to inform prevalence estimates and patterns of CSEA across contexts.

The meta-analysis modelling approach did not include all identified studies; only those meeting specific methodological criteria were retained (see Data Analysis section for details). For the number of studies included in the Western Europe analysis by CSEA subtype, refer to Table 8.

In the case of South Asia, a total of 6 studies were included in the analysis of rape or sexual assault, limited to lifetime recall estimates only due to the availability of data.

Number of studies included in meta-analysis by CSEA subtype for Western Europe

CSEA Subtype	Lifetime recall (strict)	Lifetime recall (broad)	Past year recall (strict)	Past year recall (broad)
Rape	15	17	–	–
Sexual assault	13	15	–	5
Rape or sexual assault	39	48	6	8

In terms of perpetrator subtypes, only Western Europe yielded a sufficient number of studies for meaningful analysis. A total of 12 studies included information on perpetrators, categorised according to the conceptual framework: family members, strangers, and peers. However, data related to peer-perpetrated victimisation was limited, as it was not disaggregated by specific CSEA subtypes, and was therefore excluded from the analysis.

Breakdown of Included Studies by Perpetrator Subtype and CSEA Subtype:

Family members:

- 5 studies reported on rape or sexual assault by family members
- 6 studies reported on rape by family members
- 4 studies reported on sexual assault by family members

Strangers:

- 4 studies reported on rape perpetrated by strangers.

Data Analysis

Previous studies have observed variation in the estimates of prevalence of violence against children, influenced by several methodological factors. These factors include the method of data collection, sample type (household versus school), sample site, national or subnational survey, respondent type (parent, adult recall, young adult recall, child), sample size, response rate, use of self-administered surveys, use of standard definitions for violent behaviours, and the definition of childhood (Andrews et al., 2004; Barth et al., 2012; Bolen & Scannapieco, 1999; Fang et al., 2015; Haugaard & Emery, 1989; Wynkoop, Capps, & Priest, 1995). A minimum of four studies was required to conduct a meta-analysis. However, even if a country met this threshold, a meta-analysis might still not be carried out if the criteria for statistical implementation were not satisfied, including adequate data for effect size calculations, sufficient variance information for multilevel modelling, and appropriate hierarchical structure for the meta-analytic framework.

To produce reliable and robust prevalence estimates of offline CSEA, two sets of prevalence estimates were produced where data was available, namely strict and broad estimates (see detailed explanations below). The estimates were based on the Risk of Bias (RoB) assessment adapted from Hoy et al. (2012), while also factoring in key considerations from the field. Although individual studies may be rated as low risk overall using the RoB assessment tool, we acknowledge that certain key elements essential for producing a reliable estimate within those studies may be scored as high risk. Therefore, it is crucial to not only rely on the overall RoB score but also take into account these specific high-risk components when evaluating the quality of individual studies. By doing so, we can ensure that the studies included in the meta-analysis are appropriately weighted, and that the final prevalence estimates reflect the most accurate and reliable data available.

Strict Estimates

To attempt to mitigate the risk of overestimating CSEA prevalence, strict estimates were used. These are drawn from studies assessed as low risk according to a RoB framework adapted from Hoy et al. (2012). A survey was conducted with members of the Indicator Area research team and the Technical Sub-committee to identify key considerations for prioritising RoB factors in determining the strict prevalence estimate, including:

- Representativeness of national/target population
- Case definition
- Data collection methods
- Broad estimates
- Broad estimates were derived from a broader pool of studies, i.e., studies rated as moderate or high risk for some items, for example:
  - Use non-standard or broad definitions of CSEA
  - Lack clearly defined denominators or sampling methods

Inclusion of less rigorous data: A broad estimate would cast a wider net by including studies with varied quality or measurement instruments, recognising the potential for underreporting and unaccounted cases.

This more inclusive strategy might result in higher prevalence estimates that aim to capture the full range of possible exposure, especially in under-researched contexts. It will also be used to offer insights into potential methodological issues within the evidence base by showing differing prevalence rates.

Overall, studies were categorised into two primary groups based on their risk of bias (RoB) assessments: **Strict** and **Broad**. The Strict category included studies rated as having an overall Low RoB and Low risk in each of the three key domains - meeting all four criteria concurrently. The Broad category included the studies meeting the Strict criteria plus all other studies that fall within the predefined inclusion threshold (e.g., overall Low or Moderate RoB), such that the Strict group was completely nested within the Broad group.

If sample sizes permit, the Broad group was further subdivided into Broad (Moderate) - studies with an overall Low RoB but with one or more Moderate (or High) ratings in the key domains - and Broad (*High*), comprising the remaining eligible studies. This three-level classification was defined a priori and applied only if subgroup sizes were sufficient to support meaningful analysis.

It is important to recognise that changes in the number of included studies between the two approaches do not necessarily result in a consistent or predictable effect on the pooled estimate. Variations may occur in either direction depending on the characteristics of the specific literature set. In some instances, studies with slightly

less rigorous methodologies may either under- or overestimate effects, thereby influencing the overall estimate upwards or downwards.

Confidence intervals for proportions can sometimes extend below zero, particularly in smaller subgroup analyses, because the statistical models are not constrained to the 0–1 range. Since negative prevalence is not meaningful, these lower bounds are truncated at zero in figures. Confidence intervals that include 0% reflect high uncertainty due to limited data, not a flaw in the analysis. The point estimate remains valid, but the range indicates that very low prevalence cannot be ruled out.

For the final presentation of the data, we calculate both strict and broad estimates. However, broad estimates are used in major lay-facing outputs because they incorporate a wider range of studies and are easier for a general audience to interpret. Reporting broad estimates in these outputs ensures the findings are more inclusive and accessible. In this document, we present both broad and strict estimates to provide readers with the option to explore the differences between them and to access more detailed information on the basis of each approach.

Meta-Analytic Approach

Random Effects

Random effects were used to account for unobserved heterogeneity among studies. It is assumed that studies from the same country are more likely to share similar contextual factors and hence report comparable prevalence rates. The standard deviation of the random effects informed the degree of pooling across studies. A small standard deviation suggests strong pooling (low heterogeneity), while a larger standard deviation indicates high heterogeneity and allows for greater study-specific variability (Maheu-Giroux et al., 2022).

Multilevel Modelling

We employed a multilevel random-effects meta-analysis to calculate prevalence estimates across studies. This approach accounts for hierarchical data structures, including:

Level 1: Individual studies
Level 2: Levels of representativeness nested with countries (e.g. sub-national, local)

Level 3: Countries

This hierarchical model allows for clustering of studies within countries and stratifies by region, improving the accuracy and generalisability of pooled estimates. Where data are sparse, a simplified two-level model (studies nested within levels) was used, e.g. for country-specific estimates.

Heterogeneity Analyses

High heterogeneity is anticipated given the variation in study settings, sample sizes and methodologies. The random-effects framework therefore served primarily to summarise average prevalence estimates, while still allowing for study-level variability. Heterogeneity was evaluated using:

- The I^2 statistic;
- Between-study variance (τ^2);
- Visual inspection of forest plots.

Statistical Implementation

All statistical analyses were conducted using R (R Core Team, 2018). Meta-analytic models were implemented using the metafor package using the rma.mv() function, which fits multilevel meta-analytic models via linear mixed effects models. For region-wide models, these used a 2-level hierarchy (country, and level of representatives nested within country) and for country-specific models, a single random effects term for the level of representativeness only. As the function calculates meta-analytic estimates for general effect sizes and variances (not prevalences specifically), the confidence intervals that result are not bounded to the (0,1) range – negative values are therefore truncated when reporting.

Where necessary, hand calculation of higher-level summaries was carried out for each paper. For example, where a paper provides estimates separately for males and females of the prevalence of sexual assault, these were combined to give a single prevalence for both sexes. Similarly, where sexual assault and rape prevalences were provided, aggregation of these to appropriate gender categories (male, female or both, as appropriate) were carried out to provide an estimate of general offending (classified as a Mixed category, provided directly by some publications and coded for in the data extraction database).

Data Quality and Limitations

The systematic review underpinning offline CSEA victimisation drew primarily on quantitative survey data that report prevalence estimates of offline CSEA at

national, sub-national, or regional levels for West Europe and South Asia. While these traditional survey-based methods (e.g., household, school-based, or administrative data collections) remain the most common approach to measuring child sexual victimisation, they were also limited in their ability to identify 'hidden' victims - especially in contexts where stigma, fear, or social norms inhibit disclosure.

The diversity of definitions, indicators, and methodological choices across the literature presents further challenges for comparability and standardisation. Many studies apply varying thresholds for severity, age cut-offs, or perpetrator classifications, and often rely on single item screening questions, limiting the depth of data captured. Although this review used a robust conceptual framework aligned with UNICEF's International Classification of Violence Against Children (ICVAC), variations in operationalisation and measurement tools remain a source of inconsistency across studies.

Finally, data availability remains uneven across regions, particularly in low-resource contexts, and studies disaggregated by perpetrator type (e.g., family member, peer, or stranger) are still limited. These evidence gaps restrict regional comparability and limit the potential to conduct robust subgroup analyses across perpetrator type, gender, and age.

As part of Childlight's commitment to transparency, reproducibility, and open science, the dataset for offline CSEA victimisation has been made open access (insert link here when available), enabling researchers, practitioners, and policymakers to explore, test, and build on the underlying data.

Summary

Despite these limitations, the current review represents the most comprehensive synthesis to date of offline CSEA victimisation prevalence estimates in South Asia and Western Europe. Drawing on a wide array of representative quantitative sources, this review combined academic databases, grey literature repositories, and government and NGO reports to identify relevant studies. Reference chaining, expert consultations, and prior systematic reviews were also used to ensure the broadest possible inclusion.

Importantly, the scope of this research was not restricted to English-language sources. Language filters were systematically searched to mitigate language bias and identify additional studies in languages relevant to South Asia and Western Europe. This enhanced the completeness and cultural diversity of the dataset and improved the validity of the meta-analysis.

Link to Registered Protocol: https://osf.io/26fxk/

Ethics Approval: Not applicable.

AI Disclosure: AI tools were used to assist in identifying relevant language-specific databases. The research team subsequently applied language-based filters across major academic databases to identify eligible studies for inclusion in the systematic review. In addition, AI tools were used to support the translation of non-English studies.

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PART 3

Technology-Facilitated Victimisation Surveys Indicator Area

TF-CSEA refers to a range of sexually harmful behaviours that occur online or through the use of other digital technologies. It includes online solicitation, non-consensual image taking and sharing, forced exposure to pornography/unwanted sexual content, livestreaming of child sexual abuse, sexual exploitation, or sexual extortion (Bryce et al., 2023; Finkelhor et al., 2022; WHO, 2022). The term is now well-established and consistently used in research as an umbrella construct for various forms of online and technology-facilitated abuse, in line with the latest Terminology Guidelines for the Protection of Children from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (ECPAT International, 2025). Childlight updated the systematic review in ITL Index 2024 in order to include new TF-CSEA studies published over the past year, as well as additional sources provided by members of Childlight's Index Impact and Communications Working Groups. A key change to the 2024 framework involved separating forced/unwanted exposure to sexually explicit material/pornography from non-consensual taking and sharing of sexual images and videos. Five broad subtypes – online solicitation, child sexual abuse material/image-based sexual abuse (CSAM/IBSA), unwanted exposure to sexual content, online sexual exploitation and sexual extortion – were defined based on the existing terminology guidelines, empirical research and with consideration of selected international and national policies and legislation.

Prevalence of Technology-Facilitated CSEA – Technical Note

Krzeczkowska, A., Anderson, N., Fry, D., Lamond, M., Page, S., & Lu, M.

Introduction

This section presents the regional prevalence of victimisation of technology-facilitated child sexual exploitation and abuse (TF-CSEA). More specifically, it provides estimates for the number of victims under the age of 18 on the regional scale who have experienced different forms of TF-CSEA.

Although a growing body of evidence on both offline and online child abuse and exploitation is published and widely disseminated, estimating the full extent of these crimes remains extremely challenging due to their 'hidden' nature and the fragmentation of the associated data. Therefore, to better understand the risks that children are facing in the online environment; the magnitude of victimisation; and what data is available and known, and what is unavailable and unknown, it is crucial to estimate the scale of the victimisation and establish more precise and uniform typology and estimates on the prevalence and nature of TF-CSEA.

This review aims to update the recent systematic review on global prevalence of TF-CSEA (Fry et al., 2024, 2025) and contribute to filling the gap in our understanding of the prevalence and nature of TF-CSEA at regional level for South Asia and Western Europe. Childlight Global Index (Fry et al., 2024) highlights that TF-CSEA is prevalent in every country where it is measured and that many data gaps still exist. Based on the representative survey data, Western Europe is relatively well covered by data sources and reports some of the highest prevalence estimates of non-consensual taking and sharing of sexual images and videos, online solicitation, and exposure to unwanted sexual content in children for past year recall. According to the CSAM hosting notices/reports per population size (UN, 2022), Western Europe is also in the top three regions for highest CSAM rate (Fry et al., 2024). Regarding other types of TF-CSEA, there is still limited evidence on online sexual exploitation and sexual extortion in this region, however, the recent findings show that this is an area of increased research efforts.

By stark comparison to Western Europe and other UNICEF regions, representative prevalence data on TF-CSEA in the South Asia region is severely lacking, indicating that further efforts are urgently needed to fill the data gap in this region. This is particularly crucial as according to four of the major global data sources on CSAM (IWF, NCMEC, CRC, and INHOPE) the total volume of CSAM either hosted or reported from this region, suggests it is a hotspot for child sexual abuse material. When looking specifically at where CSAM are reported from, the NCMEC's numbers suggest that South Asia has the highest volume of reports globally.

By analysing and synthesising the existing literature on TF-CSEA, this comprehensive systematic review provides crucial evidence that can complement the current knowledge of technology-facilitated victimisation by highlighting what is, and what is not known currently; and inform policymaking and practice regarding the prevention and intervention.

The main purpose of systematic reviews and meta-analyses is to synthesise the existing evidence and keep the readers up to date. Therefore, this indicator area is not to assess changes in data points over time or identify annual trends in prevalence across different subtypes and geographies. Our aim is to produce an updated prevalence analysis of TF-CSEA, including the most recently published sources for explanatory and exploratory purposes. The annual updates can help identify emerging subtypes of TF-CSEA, monitor recurring behaviours, and inform about the existing and new methodologies employed in this research area.

The findings of this updated systematic review will be of great significance to policymakers, practitioners, advocates, and researchers as they can use the evidence to make informed decisions about allocating resources and designing effective prevention and response programmes. Moreover, the systematic review will contribute to the more general advancement of typology of TF-CSEA and its measurement, and thus, assist in the development of future research in this field. Ultimately, the findings from this review have the potential to make a significant impact in reducing the incidence of TF-CSEA and promoting the health and wellbeing of children globally.

This technical note explains in more detail how the data for the indicator area was collected and analysed, as well as reflections on data quality and limitations of the methods applied.

Data Collection

A comprehensive systematic review was primarily conducted in English language and focused on TF-CSEA globally, regionally and country-level in the Western Europe and South Asia regions. Additionally, scoping searches were conducted using the main electronic databases (Embase, ERIC, PsychInfo) for literature from Western Europe and South Asia, published in other languages. This review scanned the academic and grey literature in English to identify studies that had published prevalence estimates on any type of TF-CSEA between 15th September 2023 and 31st December 2024, to update the recent systematic review on TF-CSEA (Fry et al., 2024). The search results were supplemented by sources published in the Western Europe and South Asia individual countries, provided by the Childlight's members of the Index and Communication Group based in those locations.

Search strategy

The research team searched the following electronic databases for journal articles/ reports that met the inclusion criteria:

- PubMed/Medline (ovid)
- Global Health (ovid)
- PsycINFO (ovid)
- EMBASE (ovid)
- Social science citation index (Web of Science)
- Sociological abstracts (Proquest)
- CINAHL (EBSCOhost)
- ERIC (EBSCOhost)
- Criminal Justice Abstract (EBSCOhost)
- Google Scholar

In addition, using the same search terms, relevant articles were selected from the following journals that are key in the field of child protection: 'Child Abuse and Neglect', 'Child Maltreatment', 'Child Abuse Review', and 'Journal of Interpersonal Violence'. Relevant systematic review bibliographies were also searched.

Again, the search terms were used in Google Scholar and Google Search to identify previous reviews. Within these reviews, relevant references from their bibliographies were chosen and added to Covidence for review.

Grey literature was searched through the university library databases, specifically designed to identify unpublished or non-standard academic literature. Key grey literature sources included research by international non-governmental organisations (INGOs), UN agencies and community-based organizations (CBOs), as well as research reports from national government sources. A thorough scan of key websites that publish TF-CSEA studies was completed. This scan helped identify both grey literature and organisations/individuals that might have links to grey literature. These websites included but were not limited to:

- Child Rights International Network (www.crin.org/bcn)
- Child Rescue Coalition (CRC)
- Canadian Centre for Child Protection (C3P)
- Thorn v. International Development Research Centre (IDRC)
- Save the Children-Resource Center
- Protect Children (suojellaanlapsia.fi)
- Empowering Children Foundation (fdds.pl)
- The Hintalovon Child Rights Foundation (https://hintalovon.hu/en/home/)
- Children Online Protection Lab Centre (https://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/en/

french-foreign-policy/digital-diplomacy/the-children-online-protection-lab/)

- Center for Sexual Health and Interventions at the National Institute of Mental Health (NUDZ)
- The Italian Network of Agencies against Child Abuse (CISMAI)
- EU Horizon Portal (https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/opportunities/portal/screen/home)
- www.unicef-irc.org and other UNICEF websites, such as https://www.unicef.org/rosa/media/14081/file/Main%20Report.pdf
- International Society for the Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect (ISPCAN)
- National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC)
- International Center for Missing and Exploited Children (ICMEC)
- WeProtect Global Alliance
- Child Protection Monitoring and Evaluation
- Child Exploitation and Online Protection
- Terre des Hommes
- Internet Watch Foundation (IWF)
- INHOPE
- End Child Prostitution and Trafficking (ECPAT)
- National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC)
- Technology Coalition
- Seksuelle Overgrep mot Barn over Internett (SOBI)
- Missing Children Europe (MCE)
- eSafety Commission
- NetSafe
- Get Safe Online
- Lucy Faithfull
- Oak foundation
- www.endcorporalpunishment.org
- Sexual Violence Research Initiative (SVRI) search by region: https://www.svri.org/
- World Health Organization (WHO), WHO's own violence prevention publications: https://www.who.int/europe/health-topics/violence#tab=tab_1; and the WHO's V-Info website search under countries: https://apps.who.int/violence-info/.
- Together for Girls
- The Global Partnership to End Violence Against Children's Knowledge Platform: https://www.end-violence.org/knowledge
- UNICEF Regional Offices: search bars on the following websites
  - Middle East and North Africa (MENA): https://www.unicef.org/mena/
  - Latin America and the Caribbean Regional Office (LACRO): https://www.unicef.org/lac/en

- West and Central Africa Regional Office (WCARO): https://www.unicef.org/topics/wcaro
- East and Southern Africa Regional Office (ESARO): https://www.unicef.org/topics/esaro,
- East Asia and Pacific Regional Office (EAPRO): https://www.unicef.org/eap/
- Regional Office of South Asia (ROSA): https://www.unicef.org/rosa/
- Europe and Central Asia (ECA): https://www.unicef.org/eca/

In addition, the research team searched for comparable data on the prevalence of TF-CSEA published in:

- Demographic Health Surveys (DHS)
- Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys (MICS)
- Global School-Based Health Surveys (GSHS)
- Health Behaviour in School-aged Children Study (HBSC)
- Disrupting Harm (DH)
- Global Kids Online (GKO)
- Violence Against Children Survey (VACS)

Search Terms

In the main systematic review, the specific search strategy included the intersection of terms indicating both offline and online sexual victimisation in order to capture studies that were wider than just TF-CSEA but that may have asked questions and produced prevalence estimates for subtypes of TF-CSEA. This approach was applied in order to maximise efficiency and minimise error when conducting this large review. Search terms specifically focused on TF-CSEA were also included based on the team's experience of conducting previous systematic and scoping reviews in this area. Table 10 presents all the search terms used.

TABLE 10 The list of search terms used in the review

Line		Search terms
1		child* OR adolescen* OR infant* OR young* OR youth* OR teen* OR juvenile* OR minor* OR toddler* OR boy* OR girl* OR pre-pubert* OR pre-pubescen* OR prepubert* OR prepubescen* OR newborn* OR new-born OR baby* OR babies OR preschool* OR kid* OR puberty OR pubescen* OR minors* OR "under age" OR underag* OR preadolesc* OR preteen* OR “pre-teen*”
2	AND	"online sexual harassment” OR “online child sex* abuse” OR “online solicitation” OR “sex* cyber solicitation” OR “online child abuse image*” OR “online child abuse” OR "online sex* abuse" OR "online sex* violence" OR "technology-facilitated sex* abuse" OR “technology-enabled sex* abuse” OR "unwanted online sexual exposure" OR "harmful sexual behavior*" OR "unwanted online sex*" OR "online grooming” OR “internet grooming” OR "revenge porn*" OR "child porn*" OR "nonconsensual porn*" OR "non-consensual porn*" OR "porn exposure" OR "online sex* exploit*" OR "online sex* offen*" OR "online sex* violen*" OR "online sex* abus*" OR "online sex* aggression" OR "online sex* victim*" OR " online sex* survivor*" OR "online sex* crime" OR cybersex OR "attempted sex*" OR csam OR csai OR csea OR ocsea OR iioc OR osec OR sextort* OR paedophil* OR pedophil* OR "indecent image*" OR porn* OR "sex* extortion*" OR "online sex* blackmail*" OR "sex* video*" OR "sex* image*" OR "sex* material*" OR "online sex* harm*" OR cyberflash OR "sex* predator*" OR "sex* trafficking" OR “image-based sex* abuse” OR “technology-assisted sexual violence” OR tasv OR ta-sv OR livestream* OR "sexual exploitation" OR "sexual offen*" OR "sexual violence" OR "rape" OR "sexual abuse" OR "sexual aggression" OR "sexual maltreatment" OR "sexual coerc*"
3	AND	epidemiolog* OR prevalence OR proportion OR rate OR incidence OR occur* OR magnitude OR scale OR percent* OR count OR frequen* OR degree OR measure* OR “network scale-up” OR nsum OR “household survey*” OR “prevalence estimate*” OR “respondent-driven sampling*” OR rds OR “link tracing sampling” OR “time location sampling” OR tls OR “time space sampling” OR “venue based sampling” OR “multiple systems estimation” OR mse OR “capture recapture” OR “petersen-lincoln*” OR crt OR m-nsum OR g-nsum OR s-pps OR “sampling proportionate to size”
4		1 AND 2 AND 3

These search terms were decided upon after conducting a scoping review and pilot searches for the previous systematic review on global prevalence and nature of TF-CSEA (Fry et al., 2024). Piloting of the search strategies allowed to modify and identify the terms which produced the most relevant results. Moreover, articles on TF-CSEA were read to determine which terms were being used by academics and researchers in the field. The search terms are extensive due to the myriad of terms and the lack of consensus on the TF-CSEA conceptualisation and typology.

Inclusion/Exclusion Criteria

Several inclusion and exclusion criteria were used to select relevant evidence:

Inclusion criteria:

- The study was published in English or any relevant for this edition languages (Western Europe, South Asia) between October 1, 2023, and December 31, 2024.
- The study reported the prevalence of TF-CSEA or was an article that includes prevalence data on TF-CSEA.
- The data were based on general population samples, which means samples are representative at the national or sub-national level.
- The study included a measure of TF-CSEA.
- The study included prevalence estimates collected using traditional sampling and survey methods (e.g., random, stratified, cluster), or other methodological approaches of prevalence estimation (e.g., Multiple Systems Estimation, respondent-driven sampling, time and location sampling, network scale up method, and hybrid approaches).
- TF-CSEA needed to occur in childhood (under 18 years old); it could be self-reported either by a child or an adult; or could be reported by parents or others in a position of responsibility (e.g., teachers, medical doctors, social workers).
- The sample size needed to be at least 100.

Exclusion criteria

- Although the study might report abuse as TF-CSEA, if the offence did not occur in childhood, then it was not TF-CSEA, and these studies were excluded.
- The study had non-disaggregated data for children or adult experiences as children (e.g., making it impossible to determine findings for children under 18 years of age).
- Estimates from particular sub-populations that might not generalise to the population, e.g., patients with psychosis, psychiatric disorders, depression, autism spectrum disorder, or HIV/AIDS; samples consisting of individuals with disabilities; military or veterans; individuals with a history of criminal behaviour, offenders, or those currently incarcerated; samples consisting of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender individuals, or those within the LGBT community; samples of children living in foster homes, group homes, or other forms of

substitute care; samples exclusively comprised of victims/survivors of online CSEA (100% prevalence) as examples. Although these studies were excluded for this systematic review, they do hold value, and thus there is the possibility of including them in future research.

- Research with limited sample size/selected samples, e.g., sample size <100, case study, control study/randomised control trial or qualitative studies.
- Other types of violence: child-to-parent violence, intimate partner violence between adults, theft/robbery if no TF-CSEA estimate was present.

Data screening and selection

The screening management for grey literature, as well as online published reports and statistics were stored in SharePoint (Microsoft Corporation, Redmond, Washington, USA). The Covidence systematic review software (Veritas Health Innovation, Melbourne, Australia) was used to compile relevant peer-reviewed sources. Duplicate entries were removed. Two team members searched databases and then screened titles and abstracts to identify existing sources regarding measuring the prevalence and nature TF-CSEA, collaborating with other team members for guidance and confirmation. Following the initial screening selection, two reviewers thoroughly assessed the full texts of peer-reviewed articles, grey literature, and online published TF-CSEA monitoring data to determine their alignment with the inclusion criteria for the review. Any sources that failed to meet the inclusion criteria were excluded, and the reasons for such exclusions were documented and recorded in Covidence. In the event of disagreements among team members, efforts were made to reach a resolution through discussion. However, if consensus could not be achieved, an additional team member was brought in for consultation. The search strategy along with the selection processes was documented and reported in the final systematic review.

Data extraction

The research teams extracted data based on key publication/research information into Excel. Two reviewers independently extracted data from each of the selected studies with an existing data extraction tool, developed for previous systematic review on global prevalence of TF-CSEA (Fry et al., 2024).

A master excel file was created of all the studies and extracting key information:

- Authors & Year & Title
- Sample Population (e.g., general or special)
- National Representative or Not (e.g., national representative, subnational representative, non-representative)
- Country(ies)
- Study Type (e.g., cohort, longitudinal, cross-sectional)
- Urbanicity Type (e.g., urban, rural, suburban, peri-urban, mixed)

- Sampling Method
- Survey Site (e.g., community-based, school-based, university-based, hospital or clinic-based, web-based)
- Sample Details & Data Collection Year
- Perpetrator Type & Perpetrator Age & Perpetrator Sex
- Subtypes of TF-CSEA (e.g., unwanted sexting, sexual extortion, online solicitation, online sexual exploitation)
- Frequency of the TF-CSEA & Level of TF-CSEA
- Sex of Sample & Sample Size & Response Rate
- Prevalence (%) for each type and subtype of TF-CSEA & Number of Cases for each type and subtype of TF-CSEA
- Weighted or Unweighted Prevalence
- Variance & Standard Error & Confidence Interval (CI) of Prevalence
- Location of TF-CSEA event (e.g., home, community, hospital, online, other)
- Respondent Type (e.g., children, parents report, adults recall) & Respondent Age
- Time Period for Violence Measurement (e.g., past year, lifetime)
- Age of TF-CSEA Experiences & Age of Onset for CSEA (Child Sexual Exploitation and Abuse)
- Self-administered or Not (e.g., self-administered online, self-facilitated ACASI, interview-facilitated ACASI, interview-administered questionnaire)
- Measurement Instrument & Number of Questions Asked
- Type of Publication

Methods and findings from this systematic review were reported in line with the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses extension for Systematic Reviews (PRISMA; Page et al., 2021).

Study findings were extracted further into a dataframe to inform design of the global map and graphics used as part of the visual index. This dataframe has been made publicly available on the website in a tabular format and the dataset is also available here as part of our transparency, quality and reproducibility approach to data at Childlight.

Risk of bias assessment

We used the checklist of Hoy et al. (2012) for assessing risk of bias in prevalence studies, a framework we have used in other global systematic reviews. This checklist has 9 questions with two standard answer options (high/low risk of bias):

External validity:

- Was the study's target population a close representation of the national population in relation to relevant variables?
- Was the sampling frame a true or close representation of the target population?

- Was some form of random selection used to select the sample, OR was a census undertaken?
- Was the likelihood of nonresponse bias minimal?

Internal validity:

- Were data collected directly from the subjects (as opposed to a proxy)?
- Was an acceptable case definition used in the study?
- Was the study instrument that measured the parameter of interest shown to have validity, reliability, and cultural sensitivity?
- Was the same mode of data collection used for all subjects?
- Were the numerator(s) and denominator(s) for the parameter of interest appropriate?

The final overall appraisal takes into account the answers to the above checklist questions and the summary can have two answer options (low/high risk of bias), based on the rater's judgment. Response options for the summary assessment were low, moderate, or high risk of bias.

Data Preparation and Conceptual Framework

This section explains how the systematic review data was organised and categorised for TF-CSEA.

Data Cleaning

When conducting large systematic reviews and meta-analyses, it is crucial to perform data cleaning to ensure that the dataset is accurate and consistent and can be converted into a uniform format. This process also allows to conduct final checks of identified sources and exclude duplicates and studies that do not meet the inclusion criteria.

All these records were combined in one file for further checks and data cleaning process. Several steps were undertaken in this research to prepare the data for meta-analysis and included:

- Filtering the extracted records by outcomes reported. At this stage, only data for subtypes of technology-facilitated victimisation was included in the dataset.
- Removing studies and research reports that used a non-representative sample, or representativeness could not be verified.
- Selecting TF-CSEA subtype prevalence estimates for the full sample rather than breakdowns by different age-ranges or by perpetrator characteristics.

- Identifying research that did not meet the inclusion criteria (e.g., control study/ randomised control trials; non-disaggregated data for mixed samples of respondents; perpetrator-centric; data disaggregated by gender identity or sexual orientation and no overall prevalence for the full sample provided; no country-level breakdown; samples exclusively comprised of victims/survivors of TF-CSEA).
- Removing studies that were already included in the previous systematic review (Fry et al., 2024).
- Removing studies/reports that used the same sample/data published in other sources included in the review.
- Excluding studies that did not provide prevalence estimates.
- Overall TF-CSEA scores were calculated by the analyst where data were provided by gender breakdown only (provided the numbers of cases were reported).
- Studies were grouped by two recall periods: a) past year experience (30 days, three months, six months, 12 months, and Covid period categories combined); and b) lifetime experience (ever, before, pre-18, pre-16 categories combined).

Conceptual Framework

For the analysis, results were grouped according to the measured outcome. Table 11 presents five main subtypes of TF-CSEA that were used in this review. The initial framework developed for the previous edition of the Index (Fry et al., 2024) was carefully revised and new categorisation proposed. The framework was developed both by examining all the classifications of types of TF-CSEA, as identified in the studies and drawing from the existing literature and conceptual models (E-Safety Commissioner, 2021; Finkelhor et al., 2022; ECPAT International, 2025; Laird et al., 2022). Several iterations of the conceptual framework were developed, and the final broad sub-types listed below were included as all the studies could fit into one or more of these sub-types and they aligned with the existing evidence-base.

TABLE 11

Five broad subgroups of TF-CSEA

Aggregated subgroup	Examples of composite TF-CSEA subtypes	Description
Online solicitation	Online grooming, online solicitation, online sexual harassment, unwanted sexual talk, pressure to obtain images, voluntarily provided images in a statutorily impermissible relationship, unwanted/ non-consensual/pressured sexting (sending and receiving sexual messages, images, and videos), unwanted sexual talk and sexual activities on webcam (Sub-type informed by Finkelhor et al., 2022; ECPAT International, 2025).	This subtype covers a range of unwanted/pressured sexual interactions. Those may include casual sexual inquiries via mobile phone or Internet, as well as long-lasting sexual conversations that can lead to exchange of sexual pictures/videos, or exposure of intimate body parts/engaging in cybersex (no money exchange or threats involved). It is important to note, that all different types of online solicitation often come from peers as well as adult perpetrators. This subgroup includes receiving unwanted sexually explicit text messages, emails, photos and videos, sent by peers or adults.
Child sexual abuse material (CSAM)/ Image-based sexual abuse (IBSA)	Non-consensual images or videos taking and distributing by an adult or another child (Sub-type informed by ECPAT International, 2025; E-Safety Commissioner, 2021; European Commission, 2024)	Non-consensual image or video taking refers to having sexual images non-consensual image or video taking refers to having sexual images taken when a child was unconscious, intoxicated, distracted, or unable to consent. This subtype also includes non-consensual sharing of images/videos of a child via mobile phone or Internet. This subtype also includes non-consensual sharing of images/ videos of a child via mobile phone or Internet. It could also include so-called deepfake images in which a child's head or likeness was imposed on a sexual image of someone else; as well as AI-generated images.

Aggregated subgroup	Examples of composite TF-CSEA subtypes	Description
Exposure to unwanted sexual content	Forced/unwanted exposure to pornographic content (adult content or CSAM (Child Sexual Abuse Material)) (Sub-type informed by E-Safety Commissioner, 2021)	This subgroup includes an unwanted exposure of a child to pornographic materials (e.g., forcing a child to watch nude videos or pictures or sending a child a link to pornographic websites). Please note that unwanted exposure to sexual content occurs frequently while surfing or scrolling through social media. This type of exposure may not be precursors to a request for reciprocity.
Online sexual exploitation	Commercial sexual talk, commercial sexual images, or other commercial sexual activity (Sub-type informed by Laird et al., 2022, Finkelhor et al., 2022, and ECPAT International, 2025)	Sex acts are exchanged for the child or young person's unmet needs, via the provision of monetary or non-monetary resources (e.g., food, clothes, shelter, affection, protection, belonging, gifts and/or anything else of perceived value to the young person or child) on or offline.
Sexual extortion	sextortion, sexual extortion, sexual blackmail, sexual coercion (Sub-type informed by E-Safety Commissioner, 2021; ECPAT International, 2025)	Sexual extortion is a form of blackmail that involves threatening to share an individual's intimate image or video online unless they comply with certain demands such as to obtain money or gift cards/ other items of monetary worth, additional pictures, or other sexual activities. This subtype also includes sexual acts on webcam coerced by perpetrator.

Data Analysis

Strategy for data synthesis and production of regional estimates

Previous studies have observed variations in the prevalence of violence against children, influenced by several methodological factors. These factors included the method of data collection, sample type (household versus school), sample site, national or subnational survey, respondent type (parent, adult recall, young adult recall, child), sample size, response rate, self-administered surveys, use of standard definitions for

violent behaviours, and the definition of childhood (Andrews et al., 2004; Barth et al., 2012; Bolen & Scannapieco, 1999; Fang et al., 2015; Haugaard & Emery, 1989; Wynkoop, Capps, & Priest, 1995).

Similar variability in prevalence was also observed in previous systematic review (Fry et al., 2024), which is updated by this review. Despite significant efforts to use standardised definitions (ECPAT International, 2016; Finkelhor et al., 2022; Livingstone & Stoilova, 2021; Stoilova et al., 2021) and instruments (Finkelhor et al., 2005; Gámez-Guadix et al., 2018; Zolotor et al., 2009) to capture the broad spectrum of TF-CSEA, the evolving nature of online victimisation led many researchers in the field to develop their own outcome measures and use 'umbrella' terms from previous research or even create their own categorisations. Those efforts demonstrate that existing TF-CSEA typology and methodologies do not adequately reflect the complexity of emergent abusive behaviours and/or that researchers are not using previously developed questions in their research. The conceptual and typological inconsistencies and ambiguities constitute a challenge in terms of comparability and prevalence estimation across the existing literature.

Furthermore, the majority of studies included in this analysis were focused on investigating one specific type of harm, and only a limited number of records covered a wide range of TF-CSEA types. This variability in terms of selected outcomes and their observed prevalence estimates carried through a huge variation of the number of studies conducted across the regions.

To ensure some degree of consistency and uniformity, this research proposed five broader terms that clustered a range of TF-CSEA types. Composites of these new groupings are often presented as individual outcomes in previous research, therefore results for these subgroups of TF-CSEA should be interpreted with caution. To ensure the findings are not overinterpreted, the number of sources for each outcome and country was provided to reflect the amount of contribution of the research towards the prevalence estimates within each region. Additionally, confidence intervals are presented for all estimates.

Another challenge that was identified during conducting the initial analyses was related to the number of questions used to investigate conceptually similar forms of harms that were coded as separate items. In the absence of additional information about the research, it was not possible to establish how many individual children reported one or more types of abuse included in the measure. To address this issue, the maximum of the various individual prevalence estimates was used for each subtype of TF-CSEA in each study. Thus, a single maximum prevalence was applied to stand in for an estimate of the number of unique children involved in reporting events of a specific type.

To account for potential impact of recall period, separate analyses were conducted for past year and lifetime experiences. This recall-based breakdown was used to produce prevalence estimate for the total sample, as well as for males and females. Finally, for regional prevalence estimates, the UNICEF classification (2023) by nine regions was used. UNICEF regions were used instead of WHO or World Bank regions to highlight the significant amount of child protection programming done by UNICEF and thus potential pathways to impact in these regional groupings. It is our hope that in future iterations of the index to provide multiple country-level breakdowns for our indicators. To combine prevalence estimates between countries within a region defined by each of the nine region classifications, each country estimate in that region was synthesised into an average. Those were further synthesised into an average for a region.

Meta-analysis and statistical issues

Analyses were carried out using the R package (R Core Team, 2018). Separate analyses were run for each of the subtype, disaggregated by the recall period in Western Europe, if the threshold of four studies was met. Additionally, for studies that reported gender/sex breakdown and sufficient data (≥4 studies) for conducting the analysis, results for each indicator, recall period, region (Western Europe) and country (where possible) were also provided. A country-level prevalence estimates were also produced for countries with at least four prevalence studies.

The level of heterogeneity (i.e., observed variability between individual study estimates for a single analysis) identified in this analysis was extremely high. Therefore, the random effects model was used to function to some extent as a summary measure of the average prevalence. However, caution is required in interpretation of the results, given the wide variation in individual study estimates. These should not be interpreted as estimates of the overall prevalence of a specific TF-CSEA type within defined geographical regions (Western Europe, South Asia).

Data Quality and Limitations

The systematic review used to collect the data for TF-CSEA drew predominantly on data from a variety of surveys, which report estimates at the regional, national or sub-national level. Although the traditional survey methods appear to be the most common methods of prevalence estimation in online children sexual victimisation, they also have limitations when attempting to measure the prevalence of 'hidden' victims.

Child sexual exploitation and abuse is often reported retrospectively, months or years after it occurred, therefore most survey research relies on recollection and is prone to recall bias. This and respondents' non-disclosure may lead to underestimating the prevalence rates. Prevalence estimation techniques, such as the scale-up network method (NSUM) or multiple systems estimation (MSE), may also include hidden victims.

However, these non-traditional methods are not at present widely applied in the research on child sexual victimisation, but they may hold promise.

A wide range of emerging technological modalities of abuse have been captured by the literature included in this comprehensive review and meta-analysis. However, this diversity of offences that have been labelled with various terms and often assembled into distinct conceptual categories, also revealed the need to refine and standardise the classification and typology of TF-CSEA. Inconsistencies in definitions and measures used, constituted a challenge in terms of comparability and estimating the overall TF-CSEA prevalence.

As part of our commitment to transparency, reproducibility and quality, we have made datasets for this indicator area open access so that researchers can review, test, challenge and further build upon our work.

Summary

Despite those limitations, this indicator area provides regional estimates in Western Europe for child sexual victimisation based on a comprehensive synthesis of a variety of available representative quantitative data sources. Several academic search platforms and databases were used to identify those sources, as well as searches of references of prior reviews and eligible studies; and expert recommendations; to ensure (as far as possible) that all relevant data have been included. Moreover, the scope of this research was not restricted by the type of study context or specific TF-CSEA characteristics. This allowed the appraisal of a diverse range of TF-CSEA typologies and summaries of evidence from a range of victim-centric investigations. In addition, the searches were not restricted to the English language, which mitigated language bias and allowed the identification of additional records to extend the analysis on the reginal and country-level prevalence of TF-CSEA. Those comprehensive searches also improve the validity of the meta-analysis conducted in this research; and enhance the precision of the evidence provided by this analytical method.

Finally, combining a systematic review with a meta-analysis offers a more objective appraisal of the available data compared to the traditional narrative reviews. Although potential bias cannot be completely prevented as such, it can be minimised by using meta-analytic methods for examining independent studies for the purpose of integrating their findings. However, prevalence data on TF-CSEA victimisation presented in this report should be considered with extreme caution. The random effects should be

interpreted as summary estimates of average prevalence in the presence of very high variability distributions of individual published prevalence estimates, and therefore they are not necessarily an accurate guide to some notional overall prevalence of a specific event type either worldwide or within defined geographical regions.

Link to Registered Protocol: https://osf.io/6aj3b

Ethics Approval: Not applicable.

AI Disclosure: AI tools were used to assist in identifying relevant language-specific databases. The research team subsequently applied language-based filters across major academic databases to identify eligible studies for inclusion in the systematic review. In addition, AI tools were used to support the translation of non-English studies.

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PART 4

Frontline Policing Data Indicator Area

CSEA is a crime, and it is the responsibility of law enforcement to investigate and record it, making police data a valuable source of information on CSEA. Our police data indicators are based on publicly available data on CSEA cases and case outcomes, as recorded by the police in nine pilot countries across Western Europe and South Asia. As far as possible, indicator numbers include all officially recorded sexual crimes against children, as defined in the relevant legislation for each country. The neutral term 'cases' was used instead of 'offences' or 'crimes' because definitions for the latter two can vary with national legislation. Importantly, the number of cases should not be confused with the number of victims or perpetrators of CSEA; police recorded CSEA cases are often not a good measure of the number of victims or perpetrators due to how these crimes are recorded and counted. Where possible, the international definition of 'child' as every person under the age of 18 (UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, United Nations, 1989) was used for the indicators. However, for some countries, this was not possible given available data, so the national age of consent was used. Notably, levels of CSEA cases officially recorded by the police vary greatly across countries and over time. However, these differences do not allow us to draw conclusions about differences in the level of CSEA crimes across countries or over time, because the numbers in each country are influenced by a complex interplay of factors over and above the actual level of crime, including the rules for how reported cases are recorded.

The scale of child sexual exploitation and abuse in official crime statistics using police data - Technical Note

Vermeulen, I., Tamura, A., Ivatury, S., Nseir, D., Troncoso, P.

Introduction

Child sexual exploitation and abuse (CSEA) is a crime, and it is the responsibility of law enforcement to investigate and record, making police data a valuable source of information on CSEA. Police data on CSEA complements survey data in many ways. In contrast to survey data, police data does not focus on a sample of people from the overall population at a particular point in time but covers all cases that are recorded by the police on an ongoing basis and close to real time of when they are recorded. Moreover, unlike survey data, police data is not collected for research purposes and does not rely on research participants' decision to disclose their experience in a survey. On the other hand, not all cases of CSEA are reported to the police and not all cases that are reported are recorded (Scurich and Slobogin, 2020). In consequence, neither data source yields a full picture, but both make valuable contributions to understanding the scale and nature of CSEA. Our three indicators using official statistics based on police data are the result of a pilot study including nine countries in the Western Europe and South Asia UNICEF regions (UNICEF, 2023) to test the use of these types of indicators for the Into the Light Index on Global Child Sexual Exploitation and Abuse.

Data Collection

The police data indicators are based on publicly available data on CSEA cases and case outcomes as recorded by the police in nine pilot countries across the Western Europe and South Asia UNICEF regions (UNICEF, 2023). Only publicly available police data was used due to the ethical and legal barriers to accessing this type of highly sensitive administrative data (Goerge, 2017; Goroff et al., 2017; Woollard, 2014). Pilot countries for which such data was available include Sweden, Poland, England, Wales, Scotland, Northern Ireland, and India. No such data was found for Afghanistan. For Pakistan, police data on CSEA is not routinely published publicly, but such data was available for some years and provinces through reports from non-governmental organisations (NGOs) that had requested information from provincial police departments. Data sources were identified through desk research (manual and automatic online searches of literature and websites) and, where possible, interviews with country experts. Datasets were then downloaded for further processing.

Literature reviews served to collect further information about the data in each country and where possible, in-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted with 1-2 country experts from policing, policy, victim support or research for each country to further improve our understanding of the data, its quality, limitations, biases, and the drivers of any trends over time. All interviews were recorded and transcribed.

A data capture workbook was designed to capture the data for each country including data for the indicators as well as information about data sources, data quality and limitations, relevant key legislation, and used literature.

Data Analysis

Indicator definitions

Three indicators were defined as follows for use across countries:

- Annual number of police recorded cases of CSEA: Number of police recorded CSEA cases in the most recent 12 months period and over the past 10 years
- Annual rate of police recorded cases of CSEA per 10'000 children: Number of police recorded cases of CSEA per 10'000 children in the most recent 12 months period and over the past 10 years
- Prosecution rate and other outcomes of police recorded CSEA cases: Percentage breakdown of outcomes for police recorded CSEA cases including prosecution in court and alternative outcomes, in the most recent 12 months period and over the past 10 years. For some countries, only the percentage of cases going to court could be derived from publicly available data)

The neutral term 'cases' was used instead of 'offences' or 'crimes' because definitions for the latter two can vary with national legislation.

Where possible, the international definition of 'child' as every person under the age of 18 (United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1989) was used. However, for some countries, this was not possible. These are countries where the age of consent is below 18 according to national legislation and where the police record sexual offences against children using the national age of consent as the age cut off (e.g. England and Wales). Note that some countries where the age of consent is below 18 nevertheless provide numbers for sexual offences against victims under the age of 18 in line with the international definition of 'child' (e.g. Scotland and Northern Ireland).

Deriving case numbers

To derive the total number of police recorded cases offences capturing cases that fall under the international definition of CSEA (ECPAT International and ECPAT Luxembourg, 2016) were identified in each country and case numbers were added across all relevant offences for each country and year. In Scotland and India, total numbers for all CSEA related offences were provided explicitly and no calculations were required. For details regarding the offence categories included for each country and key legislation, see the overview table in the appendix and the archived dataset workbook for each country.

Deriving rates per 10,000 children

To calculate rates per 10,000 children available estimates of the size of the population under the age of 18 or the age of consent in each country were used, prioritising the highest quality estimates for a country rather than aiming for estimates using the same methodology across countries because we are at any rate not recommending cross-country comparisons of rates. Population estimates were not standardised for age, which should be considered as an option in the future due to the potential of age specific trends for types of CSEA and reporting behaviour. Data sources for each country can be found in the archived datasets.

Deriving outcomes measures

Out of the nine pilot countries, England and Wales had sufficient publicly available data to produce indicator showing detailed outcomes for police recorded CSEA cases including whether they went to court and what alternative outcomes were. Sweden and India also had some publicly available data on outcomes, although less detailed than the data for England and Wales.

In England and Wales, police reported cases are tracked from reporting until an outcome is recorded. Hence, the outcomes for CSEA cases each year relate to the cases that were reported to the police in that year rather than to all cases for which an outcome was recorded in the year. As some cases take longer to reach an outcome, some cases in the data did not have an outcome recorded yet, especially those that have been reported more recently (see also Data Quality and Limitations below). To derive the percentage breakdown of the outcomes for police recorded CSEA cases, the same offence categories used for the other indicators were used to identify CSEA cases. Then the outcomes recorded against those cases were grouped into the following outcome categories, indicating whether a case went to court and what happened otherwise:

- Going to court
- Evidential difficulties - victim supports action
- Evidential difficulties - victim does not support action
- No suspect identified
- No outcome recorded yet (as of January 2025)

Other outcomes

The category 'other outcomes' includes outcomes that were less commonly recorded, for example, where formal action was deemed to be not in the public interest, where a diversionary or educational activity was ordered, or where a formal or informal out-of-court outcome was reached. The numbers for the outcomes indicator were then derived calculating the percentage of cases in each outcome category out of all cases.

In Sweden, outcomes data for CSEA cases are published as part of the processed offences statistics by the Swedish National Council for Crime Prevention (Brå). A processed offence refers to a crime for which a formal decision has been made within the calendar year by police, prosecution authority, or another investigative body. Once an offence has been investigated, it is classified into one of the following outcome categories (Brå, 2025):

- Person-based clearances (i.e., cases in which a prosecution decision has been made against at least one identified suspect)
- Investigation limitation decisions (i.e., decisions not to initiate or to discontinue an investigation)
- Other decisions (i.e., a residual category for outcomes that do not fall into the two categories above)

Investigation limitations typically occur when an offence is considered minor, when prosecution would not lead to additional sanctions, or when the suspect is already being prosecuted for more serious offences. Notably, the category 'other decisions' accounts for over 50% of all processed cases, but no details are published, significantly limiting transparency around legal outcomes.

To calculate the prosecution rate, the number of cases in which a prosecution decision has been made against at least one identified suspect (i.e., person-based clearances) was divided by the number of investigated offences (i.e., excluding cases that were subject to investigation limitation or other non-investigative closures). This approach aligns with Brå's own methodology and ensures that the prosecution rate reflects the percentage of cases that were prosecuted out of all investigated cases.

This method acknowledges that Swedish data are structured differently from systems like that of England and Wales, where outcome statistics are directly tied to the year of report. In Sweden, by contrast, outcomes reflect decisions made in a given year regardless of when the offence was reported.

In Poland, outcomes data for CSEA cases are based on *confirmed crimes,* where a suspect has been identified and the crime is officially recorded. These confirmed crimes serve as a proxy for prosecution cases. The prosecution rate for the outcomes indicator was calculated by dividing the number of confirmed crimes by the total number of police recorded CSEA cases for the year. However, Poland's data does not fully capture

detailed legal stages such as case evidential difficulties, which limits the transparency of outcome tracking.

For India, some data was publicly available for the outcomes for police recorded CSEA cases, including cases going to trial, prosecution rates, and conviction rates.

The prosecution rate was calculated by extracting two variables from the public data: total cases for investigation and total cases that went to trial. These variables were used to calculate the prosecution rate as a percentage of total CSEA cases under investigation that proceeded to court.

Unlike England and Wales, India does not provide a detailed breakdown of alternative outcomes. However, India does publish official conviction rates, which are calculated by dividing the number of cases resulting in conviction by the total number of cases in which trials were completed. This provides insight into the judicial outcomes of CSEA cases that reach the court system.

Analysis of interview data

To further enhance our understanding of data quality, limitations and the factors driving trends visible in indicators for each country, we analysed interview transcripts for key messages. Due to the small number of interviews for each country (1-2), no special software was used to support analysis.

Country data workbooks

The data for the indicators as well as all additional information including data sources, data quality considerations, key information from interviews and literature, methodological details and relevant legislation were captured in the data capture workbook for each country (see our archived dataset).

Each data capture workbook and the calculations underlying it was reviewed by a team member who had not been involved in its creation for accuracy and clarity.

Data Quality and Limitations

The data used for the three indicators publicly available aggregate data from the police in each country, have important limitations and require some caveats.

Data availability

What police data is publicly available as well as the level of detail and supporting information that is available varies widely across countries. Among the nine pilot countries, no suitable publicly available police data could be identified for Afghanistan. In Pakistan, no publicly available police data on CSEA currently exists. In the absence of official datasets, we relied on alternative sources, primarily reports from NGOs,

to understand the prevalence and trends of such cases. Two key sources are the Sustainable Social Development Organisation (SSDO) and the National Commission on the Rights of Child (NCRC). SSDO collects data on police-registered CSEA cases through formal information requests submitted to provincial police departments. This dataset covers four provinces—Punjab, Sindh, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP), and Balochistan—from 2019 to 2024, and accounts for approximately 99% of Pakistan's population under the age of 18 (National Commission on the Rights of Child, 2025). NCRC, by contrast, provides data for a single year, 2024, covering Punjab, Sindh, KP, and the Islamabad Capital Territory, but not Balochistan. To triangulate and cross-check the data, information from another NGO, Sahil, was also consulted. Sahil systematically monitors media reports of CSA cases and publishes regular fact sheets, which are widely used for public awareness, advocacy, and policymaking.

Moreover, data on the outcomes of police recorded CSEA cases including whether cases went to court and what happened otherwise were very limited. Detailed data on a range of outcomes were only publicly available for England and Wales. In Sweden, disaggregated outcomes of processed offences—such as whether a case was prosecuted—are available, allowing the calculation of prosecution rates. However, a breakdown of other outcomes for cases that were not prosecuted is not publicly available.

The prosecution rate for Poland was calculated using confirmed crime data, as prosecution data for CSEA are not publicly available. Moreover, information on alternative outcomes such as cases not resulting in court proceedings is not publicly available for Poland. India's available outcome data consists of derived prosecution rates (calculated using publicly available figures on total cases for investigation and cases proceeding to trial) and officially published conviction rates (percentage of completed trials resulting in conviction), without the detailed breakdown of alternative case dispositions that exists for England and Wales.

Finally, the level of disaggregation that could be achieved across all indicators using police data is very limited, for example, a breakdown of cases by age and gender of the victim/survivor or the perpetrator was not possible because most countries do not publish data that is disaggregated in these ways.

Comparability across countries

The numbers for our three indicators are not comparable across countries and are therefore not presented side by side. Total numbers of cases are not comparable because they are not standardised by population size, and we can therefore expect some of the variation across countries to be due to differences in population size with larger populations having more CSEA cases recorded by the police. Less obviously, the case rate per 10,000 children is not comparable across countries either. The main

reason is that numbers in each country are influenced by a range of factors that have nothing to do with the level of crime and their influence can vary widely across countries (see Figure 1; Bettex, 2024; Maguire and McVie, 2017; Aebi, 2008).

For example, in Sweden, offences are recorded at the time they are reported, even if the offence occurred years earlier, and each reported offence is counted as a separate case, including in instances of serial abuse. In contrast, Poland records crime at the time the investigation is completed and typically counts one offence per victim, even if there were multiple incidents. These recording differences—particularly in the timing and counting of offences—significantly affect reported figures and limit cross-country comparability.

FIGURE 1 Factors influencing CSEA crime rates globally; adapted from Bettex, 2024; Maguire and McVie, 2017; Von Hofer, 2000

Another complication with comparing rates across countries is that the legal age of consent differs across countries, which makes rates less comparable. In some countries, cases with victims up to the age of 15 classify as sexual offences against a child while in other countries it will be cases with victims up to the age of 17. Accordingly, for some countries we were able to calculate the rate of CSEA cases per 10,000 children under 18 using the international definition of 'child' (United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1989) while in others we had to use the rate per 10,000 children under the national age of consent.

Interpretation

An important caveat regarding interpretation is that the number of CSEA cases officially recorded by the police in a year should generally not be treated as a proxy for the number of new cases of CSEA in that year, for the number of victims of CSEA in that year, or for the number of perpetrators of CSEA in that year.

One reason is that cases are not always reported to the police when they happen; victim/survivors or witnesses sometimes do not report until years or decades later (e.g. Wallis and Woodworth, 2020; Cashmore et al., 2017).

Another reason is related to the crime recording rules and practices across countries. For example, if a victim/survivor reports long-term sexual abuse by a family member on a weekly basis over five years, police in England would record one crime whereas police in Sweden would record over 100 crimes, one for each instance of abuse (Home Office, 2024; RIF-gruppen, 2012; Von Hofer, 2000; qualitative interviews; see also Table 12 below). As a result, police recorded cases could be used as a possible proxy for the number of victims of CSEA in England and Wales, but it cannot be used in this way in Sweden. This is why we recommend interpreting the numbers more narrowly as CSEA cases recorded by the police each year.

CSEA crime counting rules across pilot countries

		England and Wales	Scotland	Northern Ireland	Sweden	Poland	India
What time period does police data cover?	1. Jan - Dec 2. Apr - Mar	2	2	2	1	1	1
When is a reported incident recorded?	1. When reported 2. After investigation	1	1	1	1	2	1
Which point in time does police data reflect?	1. When offence was reported 2. When offence was committed	1	1	1	1	No information	1

		England and Wales	Scotland	Northern Ireland	Sweden	Poland	India
Is an evidential threshold required to record?	1. Yes 2. No 3. Uncertain	1[1]	1[2]	2	2	3[3]	2
How is a single instance of abuse by one perpetrator recorded?	1. As one offence 2. As two or more of-fences	1	1	1	1	1	2[4]
How is prolonged sexual abuse over time by one perpetrator recorded?	1. As one offence 2. As two or more of-fences	1[5]	2[6]	1	2	No information	2
How is abuse by multiple perpetrators on the same occasion recorded?	1. As one offence 2. As two or more of-fences 3. Depends on the case	2[7]	2[8]	3[9]	1	No information	2
How is sexual abuse followed by murder recorded?	1. As one offence 2. As two or more of-fences	1[10]	2[11]	1	2	1	2
How is a rape case with images shared recorded?	1. As one offence 2. As two or more of-fences	2[12]	2[13]	2	2[14]	No information	2[15]
How is one incident with images shared by several perpetrators recorded?	1. As one offence 2. As two or more of-fences	2	2[16]	2	2	No information	2

[1] A crime is recorded if the Crime Recording Decision Making Process (CRDMP) determines that it is more likely than not that a crime occurred.
[2] A crime is recorded if sufficient basic information (location, time, description of what happened) is provided. If no crime is recorded, a justification must be documented.
[3] There are no evidential threshold rules for reporting crimes. However, the police compile statistics only after investigation, which means that crime statistics mostly include cases that meet a high evidential threshold.
[4] There is a possibility that the same crime is counted under multiple offences defined in different sections of the law, e.g. as 'penetrative assault' and as 'aggravated sexual assault'.
[5] Counted as one crime if abuse was reported on one occasion and as several if reported on several occasions.
[6] Multiple crimes might be recorded if distinct acts or locations are identified.
[7] Multiple crimes recorded in rape cases if each perpetrator committed penetration.
[8] Depends on collaboration between perpetrators. May be recorded as one or several crimes.
[9] One crime for sexual assault. Multiple crimes for rape, one per perpetrator.
[10] Counted as one offence applying a 'principal crime rule' according to which the most serious crime is recorded.
[11] Two crimes recorded, one for each type of offence defined in legislation.
[12] One for rape (crime against a victim) and one for image distribution (crime against the state). For indecent image offences, 1 crime per perpetrator is recorded.
[13] Multiple crimes recorded for each act under distinct offence categories, unless one act enables the other.
[14] One offence for rape per child (if one occasion) and one child pornography offence per perpetrator.
[15] Three or more offences typically recorded.
[16] One for each act that falls under a distinct offence category.

Country specific data limitations

The data for each country have their individual limitations. The official police data for England and Wales includes the offence category " Sexual assault on a female aged 13 and over". Because this category combines offences against children and adults, cases in this category were not counted for the indicators, leading to this category of police recorded cases of CSEA not being included in the indicator numbers. Similar problems exist for some other offence categories and a detailed list of these can be found in the country data workbook for England and Wales.

Another source of undercounting is the 'principal crime rule' whereby several offences that are part of the same case can sometimes be subsumed under one crime using the category for the most severe offence (Home Office, 2024). More generally, police recorded crime data for England and Wales does not currently have the status of 'Accredited Official Statistics' due to evidence for a lack of reliability. Although improvements have been observed between 2014 and 2024, some issues persist including issues with the consistent application of crime counting rules across police forces (Office for National Statistics, 2024; Office for Statistics Regulation, 2024).

Publicly available outcomes data for police recorded CSEA cases in England and Wales are much more detailed than what is available in other countries. However, some caveats apply. In England and Wales, cases are tracked through the system and cases have an outcome recorded

retrospectively once the decision has been made and recorded. As a result, there is a proportion of recorded cases that do not have a recorded outcome yet and this percentage tends to be higher for more recently recorded cases. Moreover, there is also the possibility, especially for cases recorded 10 years ago that still do not have an

outcome recorded, that for some of these cases, the linking of the recorded outcome to the cases has failed rather than the cases still being open.

In contrast to England and Wales, police recorded crime in Scotland has the status of 'Accredited Official Statistics'. Nevertheless, the data on CSEA cases has some limitations. Notably, 'sexual crimes against victim under the age of 18', the category that has been used to develop our indicators, includes all cases of sexual crimes for which the age of the victim could be determined and is under 18. Given that the age of the victim cannot always be determined, this statistic is known to be an undercount (Justice Analytical Services, 2024). Data on outcomes of police recorded CSEA cases were not publicly available.

Similar to England and Wales, police data in Northern Ireland is affected by undercounting due to the 'principal crime rule', which consolidates multiple offences from the same incident under the category of the most serious offence (Home Office, 2024; Police Service of Northern Ireland, 2021). Moreover, incomplete information for recorded cases is a source of undercounting. The category 'Sexual offences against victims under the age of 18' in official crime statistics was used to develop key indicators for Northern Ireland. This category encompasses all cases of sexual crimes where the victim's age is known and under 18. However, due to instances where the victim's age is not determined or recorded, these statistics may be recognised as an undercount (Police Service of Northern Ireland, 2024). Data on outcomes of police recorded CSEA cases were not publicly available.

In Sweden, the way police record CSEA cases can result in higher numbers compared to other countries. This is because every incident is counted separately, for example in cases of long-term abuse or cases that include multiple offences on the same occasion. In addition, attempted offences are treated the same as completed offences in Sweden (Brå, 2024; RIF-gruppen, 2012). This means even if a person tried but failed to carry out a crime, it is still counted in the official statistics. Together, these practices lead to more inclusive reporting, which may make Sweden's figures look higher, not necessarily because more crimes happen, but because of more granular recording.

Outcomes statistics are published for 'processed offences' in Sweden. These are the cases in which a decision has been made within the reporting year by the police or other authorities. However, these statistics do not directly link the year of the outcome to the year the offence was reported, which makes it difficult to assess backlogs or the timeliness of case resolution. Additionally, the category of other decisions constitutes a significant share (over 50%) of processed CSEA cases but lacks detailed public definitions or breakdowns, limiting transparency and hindering interpretation of how these cases were resolved. Person-based clearance data, i.e., data for cases in which at least one identified suspect was prosecuted, are available but are not disaggregated by the year in which the offence was reported, further constraining assessments of case progression over time.

Police data for Poland present some challenges related to disaggregation and classification. While data on CSEA are collected through a multisectoral mechanism involving the Police, the Prosecutor's Office, and the Ministry of Justice, each source uses different definitions, reporting practices, and levels of detail (Lanzarote Committee, 2024). Most notably, data from the Police and Prosecutor's Office are aggregated at the article level of the Polish Penal Code (Kodeks karny, 1997), making it difficult to isolate offences against children. In contrast, the MoJ provides statistics disaggregated by paragraph within each article, which allows for more precise identification of sexual offences against children. However, Ministry of Justice data only cover convictions, whereas our indicators focus on the broader justice process—starting from police registration—thus police data were ultimately used.

Moreover, some sexual offences specified in the Polish Penal Code such as recording a naked image without consent, rape, taking advantage of vulnerability, abusing a relationship of dependency, incest, pornography, forcing into prostitution, and pimping were excluded from the indicators, as publicly available data do not provide age-disaggregated figures that would have allowed us to identify offences against children. We could not establish whether cases that fall under these excluded categories and have child victim/survivors are counted in other offence categories explicitly capturing crime against children. If this is not the case, excluding these categories has led to undercounting.

For case numbers and case rates in Poland, we used data on what are called initiated proceedings in Polish police data. These are cases where the police officially began an investigation because there was reason to believe a crime had taken place. This includes cases that were later dropped. What is important to note is that in Poland, these cases are only recorded after the police have completed their investigation. This is different from many other countries, where cases are logged as soon as they are reported (Aebi et al. 2024). Because of this, the numbers may appear lower than the actual number of incidents, since only those cases with enough evidence to proceed are included (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2015).

In addition, there were some changes to data collection in Poland in 2013. Responsibility for recording statistics on criminal acts committed by minors shifted from the police to the Ministry of Justice. As a result, post-2014 police data no longer include offences committed by minors, potentially omitting relevant incidents from our indicators. Also, since 2013, the Polish police only include preparatory proceedings initiated by themselves, excluding those initiated solely by the Prosecutor's Office (Komenda Główna Policji, n.d.), leading again to potential undercounting in our indicators.

Finally, Poland's outcome data are based on *confirmed crimes,* which are not equivalent to prosecution cases. *Confirmed crime* indicates that an offence was verified to have occurred, it does not imply that the case was prosecuted. As such, this may lead to either an overestimation or underestimation of the true prosecution rate. Hence, this

makes it challenging to assess the full legal progression of CSEA cases. Additionally, the data lacks disaggregation by victim characteristics (e.g., age and gender) and does not distinguish between cases dismissed due to evidential difficulties or other factors. This limits the ability to track case outcomes in a detailed and transparent manner. Furthermore, no specific data on cases where prosecutions were not pursued due to legal, procedural, or resource constraints is available, which affects the completeness of outcome tracking.

India maintains an extensive CSEA crime data collection system with highly detailed statistics (NCRB, 2018). However, several limitations affect the comprehensive understanding of police-recorded cases of CSEA. Regional variations in awareness and reporting practices significantly impact the accuracy of police-recorded cases across different states and territories, as confirmed through a qualitative interview with an official. These inconsistencies subsequently influence national-level statistics, potentially creating distortions in the overall picture of India's CSEA police-recorded cases. Additionally, the current recording methodology captures incidents according to their reporting date rather than occurrence date, meaning that CSEA police-recorded cases published in annual reports may have occurred at any point in the past.

Further limitations exist regarding CSEA case outcome transparency within India. Currently, only data concerning CSEA cases that proceed to prosecution are systematically collected and published, creating a significant information gap regarding incidents that are resolved through alternative channels or do not reach court proceedings. Qualitative research with a law enforcement professional indicates that prosecution rates and declining conviction rates are substantially influenced by out-of-court settlements between affected families, though this important factor remains unquantified in official statistics. Additionally, digital evidence processing capabilities present a critical infrastructural limitation, with only approximately 15 laboratories nationwide possessing certification for examining electronic evidence under Section 79A of the Information Technology Act 2000. An interviewee noted that cases involving online CSEA evidence frequently result in acquittals specifically due to improper certification of investigation procedures. This technical limitation undermines investigation outcomes and prosecution success rates of CSEA, particularly for technology-facilitated CSEA crimes.

In Pakistan, official data on CSEA is not publicly available. For case numbers and case rates in Pakistan we relied on two main datasets. The first comes from the Sustainable Social Development Organisation (SSDO), which gathers information directly from provincial police departments through formal information requests (SSDO, 2024). The second comes from the National Commission on the Rights of Children (NCRC), which also obtained data from police records (NCRC, 2025). These two datasets differ in several ways, including the areas they cover, the years included, and the types of offences recorded under the Pakistan Penal Code.

SSDO data cover the four provinces Punjab, Sindh, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP), and Balochistan over the period from 2019 to 2024. Together, these provinces account for approximately 99% of the country's child population (National Commission on the Rights of Child, 2025). The Islamabad Capital Territory, Gilgit-Baltistan, and Azad Jammu and Kashmir are not included. The SSDO dataset is useful for examining trends over multiple years, but it does not provide detailed information by Penal Code section, age, or gender.

NCRC data, in contrast, cover only a single year, 2024. They include Punjab, Sindh, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, and the Islamabad Capital Territory, but not Balochistan. Although the geographic coverage is slightly smaller than SSDO's, NCRC records a broader range of child sexual violence offences under the Pakistan Penal Code and provides additional details by age and gender of victims. Because of this, the total number of cases recorded by NCRC is higher than SSDO for the same year, even though fewer areas are included.

In 2024, kidnapping or abduction to compel for marriage was the most frequently recorded offence in NCRC data, with over 10,500 cases. Offences related to child marriage accounted for nearly half of all cases (48%). Female victims made up the majority, followed by male victims, with a very small number of transgender victims. Provincially, Punjab reported the highest number of cases, followed by Sindh, KP, and Islamabad Capital Territory.

While NCRC data are valuable for understanding patterns of offences and disaggregated legal information, they cover only a single year and cannot show trends over time. It is also important to note that these data may include some double counts, as both victimisation cases and punishment cases are recorded under child sexual violence. We decided not to exclude these potential double counts, as we had no opportunity to clarify the possible issues with the authorities, and the figures are presented as reported by NCRC. Future research may use NCRC data for more detailed analyses, including Penal Code-specific patterns, age and gender differences over times.

The SSDO also began publishing limited outcomes data for the four provinces in 2025, including the number of cases that progressed to various stages such as challan (cases sent forward for trial), under trial, conviction, acquittal, and withdrawal. However, this dataset was not used for case rates in the current report due to several unclarities and concerns. For instance, the reported number of investigated cases was smaller than the number of cases sent to trial, raising concerns about how these categories are defined or recorded.

Lastly, for Pakistan, no qualitative interviews were conducted with government agencies. This decision was made to maintain a constructive and respectful approach, as efforts are currently underway to build collaborative relationships with relevant authorities.

The analysis of CSEA crime patterns in Afghanistan faced substantial constraints due to the complete absence of publicly available crime statistics. Due to this, a targeted literature review was conducted to gain insights into the country's CSEA crime landscape. This revealed the practice of Bacha Bazi, which involves boys being exploited through economic transactions between social classes for entertainment and sexual purposes (Essar et al., 2021). However, it should be noted that this review was not exhaustive due to time and resource limitations. The lack of systematic crime data collection and publicly accessible data significantly restricts the ability to conduct comprehensive analysis or draw definitive conclusions about CSEA police-recorded case trends or outcomes within Afghanistan.

More information on country specific data limitations can be found in the notes tab of the data workbook for each country.

Link to Registered Protocol: https://osf.io/hwnvz

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Appendix

Table 13 Sexual offences against children in publicly available crime statistics used to calculate indicator numbers

CSEA types	England & Wales[2]	Scotland	Northern Ireland	Sweden	Poland	India	Pakistan
	Sexual Offences Act 2003 (SOA)	Sexual Offences (Scotland) Act 2009	Sexual Offences (Northern Ireland) Order 2008	Brottsbalken (Swedish Penal Code) 1962:700	Kodeks Karny (Polish Penal Code) 1997	Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act (POCSO), 2012	Pakistan Penal Code (PPC),1860
Rape	Rape (Sec. 1)	Rape (Sec. 1)	Rape (Art. 12)	Rape (6 kap. 1 §)		Penetrative sexual assault against children (Sec. 4)	375 (Rape)
		Attempted rape (Sec. 2)		Gross(aggravated) rape (6 kap. 4 a §)		Aggravated penetrative sexual assault (Sec. 6)	375-A (Gang rape)
				Negligent rape (1 a §)			376 (Punishment for rape)
				Sexual abuse against person under 18 years (6 kap. 6 §)			
Penetrative CSA (not penile)	Sexual assault by penetration (Sec. 2)	Sexual assault by penetration (Sec. 3)	Sexual assault by penetration (Art. 14)	Sexual abuse against person under 18 years (6 kap. 6 §)	Sexual Intercourse and Other Sexual Acts with Minors (Art.200)	Penetrative sexual assault against children (Sec. 4)	367-A (Kidnapping/abducting to subject to unnatural lust)

CSEA types	England & Wales[2]	Scotland	Northern Ireland	Sweden	Poland	India	Pakistan
	Sexual Offences Act 2003 (SOA)	Sexual Offences (Scotland) Act 2009	Sexual Offences (Northern Ireland) Order 2008	Brottsbalken (Swedish Penal Code) 1962:700	Kodeks Karny (Polish Penal Code) 1997	Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act (POCSO), 2012	Pakistan Penal Code (PPC),1860
Penetrative CSA (not penile)		Penetrative sexual activity with older child (13-15) (Sec. 21) Intercourse with older child (13-15) (Sec. 22)				Penetrative sexual activity with older child (13-15) (Sec. 21)	7 (Unnatural offences
		Older child (13-15) engaging in sexual conduct with another older child (Sec. 23)					
Non-penetrative CSA		Cause a child to be present/ look at sexual activity (Sec. 26)	Sexual activity (age 13-15: Art. 16-19; under age 13: Art. 20-23)	Negligent sexual assault (6 kap. 3 §)		Sexual assault (Sec. 7&8)	509 (Word, gesture or act intended to insult the modesty of a woman)
		Communicating indecently with a child (Sec. 15)				Aggravated sexual assault (Sec. 9&10)	

CSEA types	England & Wales[2]	Scotland	Northern Ireland	Sweden	Poland	India	Pakistan
	Sexual Offences Act 2003 (SOA)	Sexual Offences (Scotland) Act 2009	Sexual Offences (Northern Ireland) Order 2008	Brottsbalken (Swedish Penal Code) 1962:700	Kodeks Karny (Polish Penal Code) 1997	Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act (POCSO), 2012	Pakistan Penal Code (PPC),1860
Non-penetrative CSA		Sexual exposure to a child 9 (Sec. 16)		Sexual molestation (6 kap. 10 §) against child			
		Voyeurism (Sec. 14)					
		Sexual coercion (Sec. 4)					
			Sexual activity with older child (13-15) (Sec. 21)				
			Older child (13-15) engaging in sexual conduct with another older child (Sec. 23)				
Sexual exploitation	Abuse of children through sexual exploitation (Sec. 48-50; 53-57)	Procuration of sexual services from child under 18 (Sec. 30)	Abuse of children through prostitution and pornography (Art. 56-58)	Sexual exploitation of person under 18 years (6 kap. 5 §) Trafficking in human beings for sexual purposes (4 kap. 1 a §) against person under 18 years	Online Contact with Minors for Sexual Exploitation (Art.200a)		371-A (Selling any person for prostitution) 371-B (Buying any person for prostitution)

CSEA types	England & Wales[2]	Scotland	Northern Ireland	Sweden	Poland	India	Pakistan
	Sexual Offences Act 2003 (SOA)	Sexual Offences (Scotland) Act 2009	Sexual Offences (Northern Ireland) Order 2008	Brottsbalken (Swedish Penal Code) 1962:700	Kodeks Karny (Polish Penal Code) 1997	Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act (POCSO), 2012	Pakistan Penal Code (PPC),1860
Sexual exploitation				Exploitation of child under 18 years for sexual posing (6 kap. 8 §)			365-B (Kidnapping/inducing woman to compel for marriage)
				Purchase of a sexual act from a child under 18 years (6 kap. 9 §)			
Image-based CSA		Taking, distribution etc indecent photos of children (Sec. 52-54)	Abuse of children through prostitution and pornography (Art. 56-58)	Child pornography crimes (6 kap. 10 a §) including internet related child pornography crimes		Using child for pornographic purposes (Sec. 13)	
		Procuration of child under 18 for pornography (Sec. 30)				Storage of pornographic material involving child (Sec. 15)	

CSEA types	England & Wales[2]	Scotland	Northern Ireland	Sweden	Poland	India	Pakistan
	Sexual Offences Act 2003 (SOA)	Sexual Offences (Scotland) Act 2009	Sexual Offences (Northern Ireland) Order 2008	Brottsbalken (Swedish Penal Code) 1962:700	Kodeks Karny (Polish Penal Code) 1997	Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act (POCSO), 2012	Pakistan Penal Code (PPC),1860
Incest / familial sexual offences			Incest or familial sexual offences (Art. 54)	Sexual intercourse with a descendant or a sibling (6 kap. 7 §)			377-A (Sexual abuse)
							377-B (Punishment for sexual abuse)
Sexual grooming	Sexual grooming	Grooming of children for purposes of sexual offences (Sec. 19)	Sexual grooming (Art. 67A)	Contact with child for sexual purposes ("grooming") (6 kap. 10 a §)			292-A (Exposure to seduction)
CSA with abuse of trust or vulnerability		Sexual abuse of trust of person under 18 (Sec. 28)	Abuse of position of trust of a sexual nature (Art. 30&31)	Sexual abuse against person under 18 years (6 kap. 6 §)			366-A (Procuration of minor girl)
		Sexual activity etc. with a person with a mental disorder (Art. 26)					

PART 5

Child Helpline Data Indicator Area

Child helpline data is a valuable source of information regarding the scale and nature of CSEA as it represents victims/survivors contacting child helplines regarding abuse experienced by themselves, or others contacting the child helpline reporting on their behalf. Through an innovative data partnership with Child Helpline International (CHI), we worked collaboratively to support a deeper analysis of CSEA data for the ITL Index 2025. Child helpline data was collected by counsellors (frontline individuals working on behalf of the child helpline) who tag each contact into relevant categories. Once a year, the member organisations of CHI submit the data for the previous year, aggregating all individual tags. The aggregated data in the year 2023 was shared with Childlight. We analysed the data pertaining to the countries in Western Europe and South Asia. The dataset included the number of times that counsellors tagged calls (or other communications with the child helpline such as emails) under various categories. The violence category is made up of the number of tags by counsellors referring to emotional, physical and sexual abuse. The sub-category of violence is the CSEA category, which is the combination of the categories: commercial sexual exploitation (offline); TF-CSEA; and sexual violence (offline). It is important to note that the number of tags in categories does not necessarily correlate with the number of times that the child helplines were contacted; or the number of individuals contacting the child helpline in relation to violence and CSEA.

The data from CHI is describing the scale and nature of categories of sexual exploitation and abuse by gender and/or sex. As the CHI member helplines cater for individuals up to age 24, this means that the data have also captured instances of exploitation and abuse which were not experienced by children (individuals aged seventeen and younger). However, this data is still a valuable resource for estimating the magnitude of CSEA, as the existing data landscape is fragmented.

Child helpline frontline data – Technical Note

McFeeters, A. & Shuster, A.

Introduction

Child sexual abuse is a serious violation of children's rights. It is now regarded as a global public health epidemic which is associated with severe negative health effects (Hoft & Haddad, 2017; Undie & Mak'anyengo, 2022). Helpline data are a valuable resource for understanding, addressing and responding to public health concerns, such as child abuse.

In order to prevent abuse, and protect children, first of all, an accurate picture of the maltreatment landscape is required. The objective of this research is to better understand the magnitude and geographic spread of child sexual exploitation and abuse, through help-seeking administrative data from Child Helpline International (CHI).

The data from CHI is describing the scale and nature of categories of sexual exploitation and abuse by gender and/or sex. As the CHI member helplines cater for individuals up to age 24, this means that the data have also captured instances of exploitation and abuse which were not experienced by children (individuals aged seventeen and younger). However, this data is still a valuable resource for estimating the magnitude of CSEA, due to the existing data landscape being fragmented.

The partnership between Childlight and CHI is a step towards strengthening the data and the evidence-base around the scale and nature of abuse by including child helpline data with the existing survey data and publicly available police data; and also drawing attention to data gaps e.g. where no helplines exist. Child helplines are key for victim/survivor reporting and support as they are a “low-threshold, child-friendly, confidential and safe service for children to build trust in the system and eventually disclose sexual abuse and exploitation, making further action and support possible” (Child Helpline International, 2022c). Helpline data also contains non-disclosed abuse, that is, abuse that has not been disclosed to health services, social services or law enforcement. Therefore, the analysis and inclusion of helpline data will add one more piece to the puzzle of estimating the scale of CSEA globally.

For the 2025 and 2026 Index, CHI’s administrative data allow the testing of the viability of victimisation indicators using evidence from child helplines. In turn, this will fortify the data leading to robust evidence which can drive transformational and sustainable change to safeguard children globally.

This research is not about testing the capability of child helplines as a reporting mechanism; rather using the data is gleaned from them to estimate the scale of CSEA.

History of Child Helpline International

CHI was formed in 2003, when 49 child helplines came together to form a global network with members providing support to each other. CHI "is a collective impact organization with 155 members from 133 countries and territories around the world. We coordinate information, viewpoints, knowledge and data from our child helpline members, partners and external sources. This exceptional resource is used to support child protection systems globally, regionally and nationally, and to help our members advocate for the rights of children and amplify their voices" (Child Helpline International, 2022a).

CHI is registered as a stichting (foundation) in The Netherlands and operates under Dutch law. CHI's members are independent organisations, whose operations are legally and administratively separate from CHI. Full members actively operate a child helpline and are required to submit information on the data regarding contacts/communications received from individuals (either children or young people contacting the helpline on their own behalf; or individuals contacting on behalf of children and/or young people); as well as pay an annual membership fee and self-assess their operation against the Core Quality Standards for Child Helplines. Provisional members are organisations that have the ambition to start a child helpline or have recently started a child helpline.

These child helplines provide help, support and counselling services to children and young people under 25 years old. Counselling contacts/communications are those whereby the child helpline was able to provide assistance to the caller. This includes, but is not limited to, contacts/communications where child helpline counsellors and staff listened, advised, or supported the caller.1 These are different to non-counselling contacts/communications, where the child helpline did not provide direct assistance to a child or young person because of the nature of the contact, which include silent, abusive and missed contacts. The data that were provided to Childlight were the number of times that counsellors tagged a call, text, email etc. under a specific category; disaggregated by gender and/or sex (the gender and/or sex either of the child/young person contacting; or the gender and/or sex of the child/young person about whom the call is about). The data does not encompass the number of contacts/communications to helplines; or the number of callers.

Child helplines base their work on the principles of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). The UNCRC "spells out the basic human rights that children everywhere have: the right to survival; to develop to their fullest; to protection from harmful influences, abuse and exploitation; and to participate

fully in family, cultural and social life. The UNCRC also specifically gives children the right to be heard and to express their views without fear of harm or reprisal. Child helplines help to ensure that all children have the opportunity to be heard. Often, child helplines are a child or young person's first point of contact with child protection services, and the most trusted and accessible gateway for them to find much needed further support" (Child Helpline International, 2022b).

Data Collection

CHI is the umbrella organisation of member helplines. Every year, these member child helplines submit their data on the number of times that counsellors tag contacts/communications (such as emails, chat boxes, calls etc.) from children and young people; or from persons concerned about children and/or young people; to CHI. In this administrative data, these helplines report on the types of issues that were raised in these communications, along with background information such as the gender and/or sex of whom the communication is about amongst other variables.

Therefore, the data that is analysed by Childlight is the number of times that categories are tagged, that is, how the child helpline staff document the contact (which is usually calls, but, in some instances, can be text or other forms of communication), into categories. The dataset included the number of times that counsellors tagged calls (or other communications with the child helpline such as emails) under various categories. The violence category is made up of the number of tags by counsellors referring to emotional, physical and sexual abuse (please see the definitions on page 113 for more information). The sub-category of violence is the CSEA category, which is the combination of the categories: commercial sexual exploitation (offline); TF-CSEA; and sexual violence (offline). It is important to note that the number of tags in categories does not necessarily correlate with the number of times that the child helplines were contacted; or the number of individuals contacting the child helpline in relation to violence and CSEA.

A contact does not always translate to a case, as there may be multiple contacts (i.e., calls) from one child or someone contacting the helpline on behalf of a child, which that may be tagged into different categories. The tags are the number of times that helpline staff tag a category (one contact may be represented by multiple tags or categories, as the contact may report multiple issues). These data are directly reported by child helplines members to the umbrella organisation, CHI, via an annual survey.

CHI's administrative data are held within an organised data management system and are updated yearly with reports from member child helplines. The data are collected in real-time as part of the day-to-day processes of child helplines. The counsellors capture and log information about the contacts and communications that they handle either during or immediately after being contacted. These raw data are stored and

managed at the child helpline level. Once a year, the members of CHI receive a link to an online survey (on Qualtrics), where they input the data of the previous year. The survey follows CHI's harmonised data framework, which was co-developed with members in 2019, encompassing all relevant pieces of information regarding the contact/communication; and aligned, when possible, with other international frameworks. The framework consists of background information on the contact/communication, such as the age, gender and living situation of the child or young person concerned; the reason that the contact was made (e.g. type of abuse);2 and the actions taken by the counsellor in its aftermath (e.g. a referral to child services). For example, in the 'living situation' category, the members would indicate how many contacts/communications were received in the previous year concerning children living in various living environments, such as at home; in alternative care; and homeless children, etc.; disaggregated by gender and/or sex. All elements in the data framework are provided with gender and/or sex disaggregation, using four gender and/or sex modalities – boys, girls, non-binary, and unknown. Even when a caller is 18-24 and therefore an adult, the gender disaggregation is still boys and girls in the data that are collected by CHI. For the research conducted by Childlight, the terms male, female, non-binary and unknown are used.

Upon receiving a completed survey submission, the data team validates it internally at CHI. The team checks for inconsistencies in the totals provided in different sections. For example, if a total of 2,000 contacts/communications from girls and young women were reported in the section asking about the methods used by children to contact the child helpline, it would be expected that no less and no more total counselling contacts would be reported from girls overall. A combination of manual and automated (using a dedicated software) checks is applied, and any inconsistencies are followed up with the individual child helpline members, and corrected, before the data is further analysed.

Data-sharing

A formal data-sharing agreement was agreed between CHI and Childlight. This joint research project analyses this secondary, quantitative, administrative data in order to understand the magnitude of CSEA from how counsellors tag contacts/communications regarding violence and CSEA. The data that were provided to Childlight were the number of times that counsellors tagged a call, text, email etc. under a specific category; disaggregated by gender and/or sex (the gender and sex either of the child/young person contacting; or the gender and/or sex of the child/young person about whom the call is about). The data do not indicate the number of individuals who contact the helplines; or the number of contacts/communications to the helplines; but rather how many times counsellors tagged categories which came up in the contact (which could be multiple categories). Thus, this helpline indicator describes the nature and scale of categories of violence and CSEA which are being categorised by helpline counsellors, rather than the prevalence of CSEA.

The data collection procedure was that Childlight received an anonymised Excel file (from CHI) containing country-level aggregated data of the number of times that counsellors tagged contacts/communications to child helplines regarding violence and CSEA. CHI shared aggregate, redacted, quantitative metadata from 2023 with no identifiable information in order to protect anonymity. The data was disaggregated on the level of region (Western Europe and South Asia); country where the contact/communication was made; and the number of times that a counsellor tagged a contact/communication in a specific category (or categories), disaggregated by gender and sex. Although CHI collects data on multiple types of violence against children and young people, the data that were provided for this study was restricted to violence; sexual violence (offline); commercial sexual exploitation (offline); and TF-CSEA. The CSEA category is a combination of the categories sexual violence (offline); commercial sexual exploitation (offline); and TF-CSEA.

Definitions

Tags: the dataset that was provided to Childlight was counselling contacts/communications; i.e. the number of times that counsellors tagged a call, text, email etc. under specific categories disaggregated by gender and/or sex (the gender and/or sex either of the child/young person contacting; or the gender and sex of the child/young person about whom the call is about).

Contacts/communications: these are when someone contacts the helpline. It is not possible to determine whether multiple contacts/communications come from the same person. Therefore, the number of contacts/communications does not correspond directly to the number of individual persons who have contacted the helpline, that is, the same person may contact multiple times, and this will be recorded each time. However, the data used for analysis, is the number of times that categories were tagged (disaggregated by gender and/or sex) by counsellors; not the number of contacts/communications; or the number of callers.

Gender and/or sex: irrespective of whether the contact/communication is coming directly from the victim of the abuse or another person (child/adult), the member child helplines would log the gender and/or sex of the child/young person whom the contact/communication is about. For example, if a girl is calling a child helpline to say that her brother is being abused by their father, the contact/communication would be logged as 'boy'. Gender and/or sex are recorded by the individual child helplines, and this data are collected by CHI as girl, boy, non-binary and unknown.

CHI's definitions are:

Boy: the child or young person identifies primarily as male.

Girl: the child or young person identifies primarily as female.

Non-binary: the child or young person does not identify primarily as female or male or identifies as non-binary. A non-binary identity can include any gender identity that does not fall within the male/female binary. Non-binary can include transgender, queergender, gender fluid, agender, and bigender identities. Some Two Spirit people, Fa'afafine, or Hijra sometimes also identify as non-binary.

Unknown: the gender of the child or young person could not be identified for various reasons. For example, the child did not mention their gender; it was not possible to ask the gender the child identifies with (Child Helpline International, 2025, p. 8).

Some member helplines may also collect the gender and sex of the adult calling, but it is saved under a separate category, and this category was not shared with Childlight. Thus, all instances of gender and sex refer to the victim/survivor (whether the individual themselves is contacting the helpline; or someone contacting on their behalf). Childlight uses the terms male (where CHI uses boy), female (where CHI uses girl), non-binary and unknown which are derived from CHI's definitions.

Categories: the categories violence; commercial sexual exploitation (offline); TF-CSEA and sexual violence (offline) were shared with Childlight. The CSEA category is the combination of the data for commercial sexual exploitation (offline); TF-CSEA; and sexual violence (offline). The term CSEA is used even though the data contains adults up to age 24 as the abuse of children is being analysed, with the knowledge that adults are also included due to the nature of the data.

From CHI's glossary the categories' definitions are as follows:

Violence: defined as the maltreatment (improper and/or harmful treatment) of a child. Violence can take a number of forms, including emotional, physical, and sexual. Isolation and exclusion are also a form of violence. Violence can occur in many settings, including, but not limited to, at home, at school, in the neighbourhood, and online. The perpetrators can be members of the family, peers, other adults known to the child, or strangers. The present category also involves the presence of violence in the child's environment (Child Helpline International, 2025, p. 31).

The violence category contains all the CSEA categories; plus, all other types of violence such as bullying, child labour, neglect, physical violence, emotional violence etc.

Sexual violence (offline): forcing or coercing a child to engage in sexual activity, whether they are aware of what is happening or not, or if they are able to articulate what is unwanted or not. It can involve sexual abuse (unwanted sexual activity, with

perpetrators using force, making threats or taking advantage of victims not able to give consent), public street harassment, sexual touching (kissing, grabbing, pinching, fondling, etc.). Unwanted attempted sex, pressured sex (through threats, harassment, persuasion or tricks) and forced sex or sexual assault (physically or in any other way) and domestic sexual violence. It is important to note that the sexual abuse of children requires no element of exchange and can occur for the mere purpose of the sexual gratification of the person committing the act. Such abuse can be committed without explicit force, with other elements such as authority, power, or manipulation (Child Helpline International, 2025, p. 38).

Commercial sexual exploitation (offline): a child performing a sexual act in exchange for (a promise of) something of value (including, but not limited to, money, objects, shelter, food, drugs, etc.). The use, procuring or offering of a child for prostitution, for the production of child sexual abuse material or for sexual performances. It can involve the trafficking of children for commercial sexual exploitation. It can also take place in the context of travel and/or tourism. In these cases, the offence can be committed by either foreign or domestic tourists and travellers, and long-term visitors (Child Helpline International, 2025, p. 34).

TF-CSEA: child sexual abuse becomes technology-facilitated child sexual abuse when it has occurred on social media or other online channels, or has a direct link to the online environment, for example, acts of sexual abuse on a child are photographed, audio-recorded or video-recorded while live-streamed and/or uploaded online, or sexual extortion (threatened dissemination of images of a sexual nature without consent, usually for the purpose of procuring some benefits). This can be for personal use and/or for sharing with others [...] Technology-facilitated child sexual exploitation includes all acts of a sexually exploitative nature carried out against a child that is at some stage connected to the online environment. This can be distinguished from Technology-facilitated Sexual Abuse [sic] by an underlying notion of exchange, for example, money, food, accommodation, drugs, affection, gifts, etc. (Child Helpline International, 2025, p. 36).

For more detailed definitions, please see CHI's Glossary.

Please see the glossary in ITL Index 2025 for Childlight's definitions of CSEA and gender and/or sex.

Data Analysis

CHI sent an Excel file containing the 2023 child helpline data disaggregated by country, CSEA categories and gender and/or sex. The table below indicates the countries that were provided.

2023 CHI data from 26 countries for the ITL Index 2025

Country	Region
The Maldives	South Asia
Pakistan	South Asia
Austria	Western Europe
Belgium	Western Europe
Cyprus	Western Europe
Czechia	Western Europe
Denmark	Western Europe
Finland	Western Europe
France	Western Europe
Germany	Western Europe
Greece	Western Europe
Hungary	Western Europe
Ireland	Western Europe
Italy	Western Europe
Latvia	Western Europe
Lithuania	Western Europe
Luxembourg	Western Europe
Netherlands	Western Europe
Norway	Western Europe
Poland	Western Europe
Portugal	Western Europe
Slovakia	Western Europe
Slovenia	Western Europe
Spain	Western Europe
Switzerland	Western Europe
United Kingdom	Western Europe

Sweden, Malta and Nepal are members of CHI, but did not report data on CSEA for 2023, and thus are not included in the analysis.

Some countries have more than one CHI member, such as the UK. In these cases, the data is aggregated across all members to present a country-level measure.

Most child helplines in the CHI network are generic, as in, they cater to all and any possible concern that a child or young person has. A few exceptions exist; of relevance is one helpline, which has a focus on sexual behaviours. A few other members are thematic, though on other topics; for example, one helpline is aimed at gender-based violence, and another is a suicide-prevention helpline.

To get a total of violence-related tags CHI summarised all tags that fall under the violence category. This includes emotional, physical, sexual, neglect, bullying, child labour, amongst others. This total is useful as a baseline when comparing specific types of violence, such as CSEA, as it can be expressed as a fraction of all violence-related tags, bypassing differences in population sizes across countries and the reach of each child helpline. For each country, numbers of tags for the categories violence, CSEA, commercial sexual exploitation (offline); TF-CSEA; and sexual violence (offline) were provided.

Using Python and Excel, for each country, the percentages of CSEA in violence were calculated. For each region and all countries combined, the percentages of CSEA in violence were calculated.

For each country, the categories commercial sexual exploitation (offline); TF-CSEA; and sexual violence (offline); numbers of genders and/or sexes; and percentages were calculated using Excel and Python.

For all countries and regions, the total numbers and percentages of tags per category were calculated using Excel and Python.

For all countries and regions, the total numbers and percentages of gender and sex were calculated using Excel and Python.

The total numbers and percentages of gender and sex per type of abuse/category were calculated using Excel and Python.

Limitations

The awareness and use of child helplines vary significantly between countries. This means that national differences in the data may reflect disparities in awareness and access to these services, rather than the actual scale of child abuse. However, when looking at national data, the proportion of tags related to CSEA may still provide some insight into country-specific differences. That said, these proportions can also be influenced by how each helpline is marketed and communicated to children.

The conflation of the gender and/or sex of children and young people (up to age 24); the fact that helplines cater for individuals under the age of 25; and that the number of times that counsellors tag contacts/communications under specific categories does not directly tally with the number of children/young people who have affected by CSEA; means that the data are not a perfect representation of the scale and nature of CSEA in the selected countries. However, these data are a valuable source of information regarding CSEA; as helplines are a vital part of the child protection landscape – they are often the first port of call for children experiencing CSEA. Child helplines provide support for; and collect data on; abuse that may not be detected by bodies such as the police, social care, education or health services. They monitor emerging trends which are not yet seen by law enforcement.

Conclusion

The uncertain scale and nature of CSEA complicates the design and execution of a successful public health strategy due to under-reporting in government data systems (Soneson et al., 2023). Administrative data from child helplines are a useful resource to understand the scale and nature of CSEA because the data collect instances of abuse which have not been disclosed to; or discovered by; the police, social work authorities or health providers. In addition, helplines gather data from individuals who may never partake in surveys. Thus, it is a valuable piece of the puzzle in generating a reliable figure of CSEA. Moreover, it removes the need to involve victims/survivors in research whereby there is the risk of re-traumatisation.

Data Management

The data was transferred from CHI to Childlight in an Excel file via DataSync. The data was then stored within DataStore. CHI followed Childlight and The University of Edinburgh procedures (The University of Edinburgh, 2024) for sharing and storing this data, found on the University of Edinburgh website.

Ethical and Regulatory Considerations

This study has successfully received ethical approval from the Childlight Ethics Sub-Committee at the University of Edinburgh (Reference UCHAD-AMF-171224CL). This is a low-risk study given its scope; therefore, the study underwent a level 1 ethics approval process.

Safeguarding and Researcher Wellbeing

The risk for this study is minimal, given that there were no research participants. All data is already known to safeguarding professionals in the countries through the helpline service. Data is presented in aggregate with minimal disaggregation characteristics thus minimising any potential statistical disclosure.

Researching CSEA is sensitive subject. To ensure researcher well-being, a separate well-being protocol for research staff was developed for this study/indicator area and is available upon request.

Advisory Committee

The study advisory committee consists of seven persons from victim/survivor charities and academics working in the field of sexual abuse.

More specifically, these affiliations are:

- Revenge Porn Hotline
- Aarhus University
- A legal expert working at the intersection of human trafficking, child exploitation, human security, and criminal law
- Survivors Trust
- Victim Support NI
- Lucy Faithfull Foundation
- London School of Economics

Meetings with the committee took place via Microsoft Teams in order to gain feedback on this research.

Link to Registered Protocol: osf.io/yk4qe

Ethics Approval: Approved by the Childlight Research Ethics Sub-Committee (CRESC) at the University of Edinburgh, Reference UCHAD-AMF-171224CL.

AI Disclosure Statement: No AI tools were used in the course of this indicator area work.

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