

# SEARCHLIGHT 2025

Technical Notes

## Who benefits?

Shining a Light on the Business of  
Child Sexual Exploitation and Abuse



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# SEARCHLIGHT 2025

## Who benefits?

Shining a Light on the Business of  
Child Sexual Exploitation and Abuse

**STUDY B: Where Does the Money Flow? An  
Exploratory Study on the Financial Structures of  
Organised Crime Linked to Child Sexual Exploitation**

Established by

**HUMAN  
DIGNITY  
FOUNDATION**

Hosted by



THE UNIVERSITY  
*of* EDINBURGH

## 1. Background

Child sexual exploitation (CSE) manifests as a deeply entrenched and harmful phenomenon, inflicting severe psychological and physical consequences upon its victims (Lo Iacono, Trentini, & Carola, 2021). Despite recent academic endeavours seeking to elucidate the determinants and prevalence of this global issue (Barth et al., 2013; Kelly & Karsna, 2017; Kloes et al., 2014; Laird et al., 2020; Buller et al., 2020), significant evidence gaps still hinder the design and implementation of effective interventions to dismantle CSE led by serious crime organisations (SCOs). A shortfall in our understanding of CSE pertains to the intricate value chains and economic structures underpinning the illicit organisations that carry out these activities. This dearth underscores the need for a meticulous examination, not only to address the existing knowledge gap, but also to identify promising avenues for further research.

Our research aims to contribute to the field by exploring and describing the financial and economic dimensions of CSE as part of illegal activities conducted by SCOs, with a specific focus on Colombia and Latin America. This region stands out as a pertinent case study due to its highly complex criminal structures with the capacity to confront the State and the evidence of sexual exploitation in media outlets. Consequently, the value chains, as well as the economic and financial structures, may exhibit a distinct and heightened complexity.

Through a review of the existing literature and interviews with experts, the study provides a structured landscape of the current state of the art of research and the specific characteristics that these dynamics may have in a developing country. To the best of our knowledge, no studies have been conducted to date that systematically compile the available information on the financial and economic dimensions of CSE carried out by SCOs. We aspire to contribute to the ongoing global efforts to eradicate CSE, and the safeguarding of children in the world.

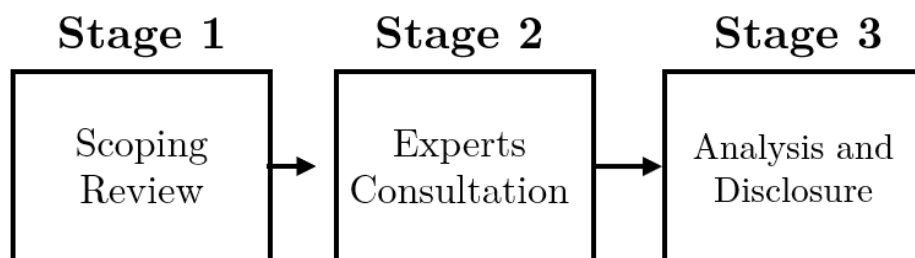
## 2. Research questions and aims

This research explored the question: What are the economic and financial dynamics of SCOs involved in CSE? Consequently, our objective was to deepen the understanding of the financial and economic structures underpinning SCOs engaged in CSE, with a particular focus on the Colombian context.

Understanding these dynamics is crucial for several reasons. First, such an understanding provides a foundation for designing more effective public policies and strategies to combat CSE. Second, it facilitates comparisons with international literature, helping to identify parallels between the economic and financial dynamics of this crime and those observed in other illicit markets. Lastly, it opens new research avenues, fostering innovative approaches to address and mitigate this complex problem.

### 3. Study design and methods of data collection and analysis

The project was structured into three distinct phases of work: (i) scoping review, (ii) expert consultation, and (iii) analysis and dissemination of findings.



#### 3.1 Scoping review

The scoping review entailed a comprehensive examination of peer-reviewed research articles and grey literature derived from specialised organisations, government agencies, and multilateral organisations. It was designed following an adaptation of the PRISMA-ScR guidelines (Tricco et al., 2018).

For the academic research, we considered only academic articles written in Spanish or English published between 1 January 2014 and 1 April 2024. The databases explored were:

- Google Scholar
- Scopus
- JSTOR
- Web of Science
- ScienceDirect

- SpringerLink Journals

For the grey literature, we identified studies written in Spanish or English from 1 January 2014 to 1 April 2024, from the following sources of information using the official documents repositories and Google search engine:

- UNICEF
- ECPAT International
- Sexual Violence Research Initiative - SVRI
- World Bank
- Raising Voices
- INTERPOL
- AMERIPOL
- EUROPOL
- Safe Online
- Safe to Learn
- Valientes Colombia (NGO)
- Fundacion Renacer
- International Justice Mission
- Colombian Children Protection Agency (Instituto Colombiano de Bienestar Familiar [ICBF])
- The Colombian Human Rights Protection Agency (Defensoría del Pueblo)
- World Health Organization (WHO)
- PanAmerican Health Organization (PAHO)
- Human Rights Watch
- Childlight Institute

### **Round 1. Financial and economic structures of child sexual exploitation conducted by SCOs**

The search employed a set of predefined keywords, tailored to capture the most relevant information within each database's capabilities. All included documents were required to contain at least one term from each of the following categories:

#### Children terms:

- **Inglés:** "child\*" OR "adolescen\*" OR "young person\*" OR "young people" OR "youth" OR "teen\*" OR "preteen\*" OR "pre-teen\*" OR "pre

teen\*" OR "kid\*" OR "prepub\*" OR "pre-pub\*" OR "pre pub\*" OR "post-pub\*" OR "postpub\*" OR "post pub\*" OR "pubescen\*" OR "pubert\*" OR "juvenile\*" OR "underage\*" OR "boy\*" OR "girl\*"

- **Español:** "niñ\*" OR "adolescen\*" OR "joven\*" OR "juventud" OR "preadolescen\*" OR "puber" OR "juvenil\*" OR "menor\* de edad" OR "infant\*"

#### Sexual terms:

- **Inglés:** "sex\* abus\*" OR "sex\* exploit\*" OR "sex\* viol\*" OR "sex\* exploit\* and abus\*" OR "molest\*" OR "sex\* blackmail\*" OR "sex\* harass\*" OR "sex\* crim\*" OR "sextort\*" OR "sex\* touris\*" OR "rape\*" OR "raping\*" OR "rapist\*" OR "sex\* assault\*" OR "paedophil\*" OR "pedophil\*" OR "Child Sexual Exploitation" OR "Child Sexual Abuse"
- **Español:** "abus\* sexual\*" OR "explot\* sexual\*" OR "viol\* sexual\*" OR "acos\* sexual" OR "chantaj\* sexual\*" OR "crim\* sexual\*" OR "sextorsion" OR "turismo sexual" OR "violac\*" OR "violador\*" OR "agresión sexual" OR "pederast\*" OR "pedofilia"

#### Financial or economic terms:

- **Inglés:** "value chain\*" OR "money" OR "finan\*" OR "money laundering" OR "finan\* flow\*" OR "finan\* structure\*" OR "economic network\*" OR "value-added chain\*" OR "banking" OR "illicit finan\*" OR "finan\* system\*" OR "econom\* system\*" OR "finan\* transaction\*" OR "fund flow\*" OR "market\*"
- **Español:** "cadena\* de valor" OR "dinero" OR "financier\*" OR "lavado de activos" OR "red económica" OR "banca\*" OR "sistema económico" OR "transacción económica" OR "flujo de fondos" OR "mercado\*" OR "transacciones"

#### Illicit structures terms:

- **Inglés:** "gang\*" OR "organized crime" OR "illicit organization\*" OR "illicit structure\*" OR "criminal network\*" OR "covert network\*" OR "illegal enterprise\*" OR "black market\*" OR "illicit association\*" OR "illegal armed group\*"
- **Español:** "banda\*" OR "crimen organizado" OR "organización ilícit\*" OR "organización criminal\*" OR "estructura ilícit\*" OR "red criminal" OR "red encubierta" OR "empresa ilegal" OR "mercado negro" OR

"asociación ilícit\*" OR "grupo armado ilegal\*" OR "organización al margen de la ley" OR "grupos criminales"

To expand the scope of the initial search and capture more relevant results, the research team identified the need to adapt certain criteria and focus on additional aspects. This led to a second search phase specifically targeting the value chains and financial structures associated with sexual exploitation, including cases of general or commercial sexual exploitation. While this approach assumed the potential victimisation of children within broader exploitation contexts, a more extended analysis later filtered and selected documents aligning with the study's core objectives.

This second search phase comprised two additional rounds, conducted separately in English and Spanish. The keywords for these rounds targeted documents focusing on the following themes:

## Round 2. Financial and economic structures of general sexual exploitation

### Sexual exploitation terms:

- **Inglés:** "sex\* exploit\*" OR "sex\* viol\*" OR "sex\* abus\*" OR "sex\* exploit\* and abus\*" OR "sex traffick\*" OR "traffick\* for sex\* exploit\*" OR "forced prostitut\*" OR "sex\* slavery" OR "child\* pornography"
- **Español:** "explot\* sex\*" OR "viol\* sex\*" OR "abus\* sex\*" OR "explot\* sex\* y abus\*" OR "trata de personas sex\*" OR "trata para explot\* sex\*" OR "trata de personas para explot\* sex\*" OR "prostitución forz\*" OR "esclavitud sex\*" OR "pornografía infant\*"

### Financial or economic terms:

- **Inglés:** "supply chain\*", "value chain\*" OR "money" OR "finan\*" OR "money laundering" OR "finan\* flow\*" OR "finan\* structure\*" OR "economic network\*" OR "value-added chain\*" OR "banking" OR "illicit finan\*" OR "finan\* system\*" OR "econom\* system\*" OR "finan\* transaction\*" OR "fund flow\*" OR "market\*" OR "business"
- **Español:** "cadena de suministro\*" OR "cadena de valor\*" OR "dinero" OR "finan\*" OR "lavado de dinero" OR "lavado de activos" OR "flujos finan\*" OR "estructura finan\*" OR "red económica" OR "cadena de valor agregado" OR "banca\*" OR "finan\* ilícita" OR "sistema finan\*" OR "sistema económico" OR "transacción finan\*" OR "flujo de fondos"



OR "mercado\*" OR "negocio"

### Round 3. Commercial sexual exploitation

#### Commercial sexual exploitation terms:

- **Inglés:** "commercial sex\* exploit\*" OR "sex\* exploit\* for profit" OR "sex\* exploit\* for commerc\*" OR "commercial sex\* abus\*" OR "sex\* trafficking for profit" OR "sex\* trade" OR "child\* sex\* industry" OR "profit-driven sex\* exploit\*" OR "economic exploit\* of sex\*"
- **Español:** "explot\* sex\* comercial\*" OR "explot\* sex\* con fines de lucro" OR "explot\* sex\* con fines comerc\*" OR "abus\* sex\* comercial\*" OR "trata sex\* con fines de lucro" OR "comercio sex\*" OR "industria sex\* infant\*" OR "explot\* sex\* con fines de lucro" OR "explot\* económica del sex\*"

These additional searches were restricted to academic databases due to time constraints.

In all cases, the process for selecting and analysing the documents was as follows:

**Step 1 – Screening:** After conducting database searches with the specified key terms, a researcher carried out a screening of all acquired search results. These findings were meticulously catalogued in a dedicated screening database, systematically documenting crucial information such as the search outcome, link, used key terms, and the search date.

From the total number of search results, the researcher scrutinised the abstracts and titles of the studies to identify those that met the technical criteria and were deemed to be potentially contributing to the study's objectives. The decisions regarding the inclusion or exclusion of each research study were methodically recorded in the screening database. If, after examining ten results, the researcher did not identify a study suitable for the project, the data extraction ceased. Subsequently, the researcher moved on to the next database or adjusted the search terms accordingly.

For selected studies, we classified their relevance on a three-level scale: low, medium, and high. Moreover, for studies classified at the highest level we developed a citation and relation review to identify additional sources of information that can enhance the overall analysis. This was done to ensure

that no paper of importance to the study was left out of the selection strategy.

Upon completing the screening process, four senior reviewers analysed the outcomes recorded in the screening database to ensure that no pertinent studies had been erroneously excluded. This involved a thorough examination of selected abstracts from the search results, conducted either randomly or guided by their technical expertise. Any differences in the selection were discussed between the researcher and the reviewer to ensure consensus on the final set to be analysed in the next phase. This step reduced the possibility of bias in the selection of studies.

**Stage 2 – In-depth analysis:** Studies that met the initial screening criteria underwent further examination in this stage. The researcher conducted a thorough review of the content within the research papers and systematically organised the most relevant information in an extended database. This tool facilitated the organisation, classification, and filtering of information relevant to the study. The database captured crucial variables for analysis, including: the date of publication, title, authors, journal, country, abstract, type of methodology, methodology description, sample, main results, and any policy recommendations. Duplicates were systematically identified and removed to ensure data quality.

Based on the analysis, the researcher decided whether the study merited inclusion in the final analysis or was excluded. The decision was recorded in the dataset to guarantee complete transparency in the process.

**Stage 3 – Results presentation:** The final selection of studies was the cornerstone for the analysis in the scoping review. During this phase, researchers categorised and condensed the information systematically to unveil patterns, pinpoint research gaps, and identify emerging trends. The base of the analysis was the extended database, which categorises the information of studies into different relevant variables.

### 3.2 Expert interviews

The key informant interviews (KIIs) aimed to enhance and enrich the information previously identified during the scoping review. These interviews addressed knowledge gaps and deepened relevant findings of the study. Experts, defined as key informants, were selected based on their expertise and knowledge of the subject. The sample size was limited to a maximum of

15 experts, with the final number being 11 interviews, determined by data saturation.

All interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim using Teams and Google Gemini 1.5 Pro software. A member of the research team conducted each interview, either virtually or in person. Before each session, the researcher provided the informed consent form, outlining the purpose of the interview, participant rights, benefits, and potential risks. This document also sought permission to record the interview. Participants were asked to sign the form if they understood and agreed to the study's terms. During the interview, the interviewer ensured that the participant comprehended the informed consent, signed the form, and had no doubts regarding the instrument's application. The interviews were conducted in either English or Spanish, depending on the preference of the consulted expert.

The research team developed an interview guide to direct the conversation while allowing for the exploration of new questions as the discussion progressed. The duration of each interview was between 40 and 90 minutes. To ensure complete anonymity, no information that could lead to the identification of the experts was publicly disclosed. The recordings will be securely destroyed upon publication of the study, in which expert names have been replaced with generic identifiers to protect their identities.

The interviews were conducted based on the interview guide, covering the following topics:

- Participant's background and experience
- Knowledge and experience regarding financial and economic structures related to CSE in Colombia, Latin America, and globally
- Payment methods and transaction characteristics
- The relationship of ESI with other criminal markets such as drug trafficking, sexual tourism, human trafficking, etc.

## 4. Sample and recruitment

### 4.1 Analysis of interview data

The analysis of interview data involved the following steps:

1. **Transcription and organisation:** All interviews were transcribed

verbatim using Teams and Google Gemini 1.5 Pro software. The transcriptions were securely stored and organised.

2. **Coding:** Coding was performed by a member of the research team using Nvivo software and following a codebook designed collectively by the research team. A thematic analysis approach was used to identify the main themes and sub-themes emerging from the data, linking the interview findings to the research hypotheses.
3. **Review:** Coding was reviewed and validated by another member of the team to reduce bias and to ensure the accuracy and appropriateness of the categories.

## 4.2 Informed consent document

The following is the informed consent form used for the development of the interviews.

### CENTRO IMAGINA – UNIVERSIDAD DE LOS ANDES INFORMED

#### CONSENT FOR INTERVIEWS WITH EXPERTS

**Ethics Committee approval and date:** Approved, 05/08/2024

**Funded by:** TBD

**Study:** How does money from child sexual exploitation flow? A qualitative exploratory study to understand the economic and financial structures of organised crime, with special focus on Colombia and Latin America

**Justification:** Through this interview, we seek to incorporate your opinions and experiences about the value chains and economic/financial structures linked to child sexual exploitation, with special emphasis on Colombia and Latin America.

**Required time:** The duration of this interview is approximately between 45 minutes and 90 minutes, depending on the topics that may arise during the discussion.

**Procedures and description of activities:** If you wish to participate in

this research, the interview team will ask you about your experience and knowledge of criminal organisations dedicated to the sexual exploitation of children, in particular about the following topics:

- The value chain underlying these crimes
- The economic and financial structures linked to this type of organisation
- The nature of transactions and markets
- The nature of organisations

**Voluntary participation:** Your participation is free and voluntary, this means that you do not have to participate if you do not want to. If you decide to participate, you can decide not to answer any questions that make you feel uncomfortable. In order to be able to transcribe and analyse the data, we would like to obtain your permission to audio record the interview. You can pause or stop recording at any time. If you agree to participate in the interview and later change your mind, you can ask us to destroy the recording and delete the data. You may withdraw from the interview at any time if you wish.

**Confidentiality:** The application of the instrument does not contemplate a foreseeable risk for you. All information that you decide to share with us will be treated strictly confidentially, that is, at no time will your name or identity be revealed. The data you share will be stored on secure servers and only the Universidad de los Andes will have access to the names of the participants, who will be treated anonymously and confidentially. The information that you allow us to obtain will be analysed with the rest of the interviews and presented in aggregate in the final results of the study. Responses will not be referenced directly to you.

**Risks and benefits:** There are no significant risks or discomforts associated with this project, or direct benefits to participating. We ask that you not mention information that could identify you during the interview, and not reveal information that could put your integrity or the course of police investigations that are being carried out at risk. However, we ask you to be detailed in the information you consider relevant, your contribution can be crucial to improving the understanding of illicit organisations linked to child sexual exploitation.

**Ethics Committee:** This study has been approved by the Ethics

Committee of the Universidad de los Andes. Any questions related to the ethical issues of the research can be directed to the email: a.harker@uniandes.edu.co . If the researcher has not answered your questions, you can contact: committee-ethics-investigations@uniandes.edu.co

After reading this consent I declare that:

I agree to participate in the interview:

Yes\_\_ No \_\_

I have read and understood the information that has been provided to me:

Yes\_\_ No \_\_

I understand and accept that my participation is voluntary, that it does not carry any financial benefit or imply any risk, and that I can withdraw at any time without implications of any kind:

Yes\_\_ No \_\_

I accept that my voice be audio recorded:

Yes\_\_ No \_\_

Full name: \_\_\_\_\_

Identification card or document number: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

### 4.3 Interview guide

The following is the interview guide used for the development of the interviews.

## CENTRO IMAGINA – UNIVERSIDAD DE LOS ANDES GUIDE FOR INTERVIEWS WITH EXPERTS

**Study:** How does money flow in Child Sexual Exploitation? An exploratory qualitative study to understand the economic and financial structures of organised crime with a special focus on Colombia and Latin America

**Objective:** To delve into the results of the scoping review and identify new findings on the value chains and economic/financial structures of child sexual exploitation through the experience and knowledge of experts.

**Introduction:** The interviewer will provide previously informed consent via email and information about the purpose of the interview. The interviewee will sign and send it if they agree to their participation. At the meeting, the interviewer will welcome the consulted expert and proceed to activate the session recording. At that time the interviewer will confirm that the informed consent was delivered, that it was signed, and that there are no doubts about its content.

Before starting, the expert will be asked not to reveal any information that could identify themselves or their family members during the interview to ensure absolute confidentiality of the process. It will also be clarified that the term "child sexual exploitation" includes adolescents up to 17 years old.

### Part I. Introductory Questions

- Age:
- Gender:
- Profession:
- Years of experience in the field:
- Sector or area of work:

Before we start our interview, I would like to talk a little more about you and learn more about your experience and work in the field of child sexual exploitation:

1. What has been your experience with the issue of child sexual exploitation? *[The following are follow-up questions that should only be asked if the interviewee does not elaborate on those details and it is considered relevant to address.]*

1.1. Did you have any job position that involved these issues? What role did you have? How long were you in that role? What kind of activities did you develop in that role? What was the name of the organisation and what were its areas of work?

1.2. Did you have any professional interest in researching this phenomenon? Specifically on the topic of child sexual exploitation, what research topics have you worked on?

## **Part II. The Nature of Child Sexual Exploitation in Colombia and Latin America**

2. From your experience and knowledge, how does child sexual exploitation work in Colombia? *[The following are follow-up questions that should only be asked if the interviewee does not elaborate on those details and it is considered relevant to address.]*

2.1. Is it an organised illegal business?

2.2. What types of CSEA have you seen most frequently?  
online/technology-facilitated?

2.3. What criminal organisations are involved in this business?  
What do these organisations do? What is the size of these organisations? Are they organised structures? How do these organisations operate? Is there a transnational linkage of these organisations with others on the continent or beyond?

2.4. Who are the victims of these crimes? Is there a specific profile that has a higher risk of victimisation?

2.5. Where are these crimes committed? In physical commercial spaces intended and/or used for such purposes, such as brothels? On virtual platforms or applications? Through social networks? Which ones?

2.6. Who benefits from this crime? What kind of benefits does this crime generate for the different actors involved in its commission? Is it exclusively a monetary benefit?



3. How is the situation in Latin America? Are there any distinctive characteristics of this crime compared to the Colombian case?  
*[The following are follow-up questions that should only be asked if the interviewee does not elaborate on those details and it is considered relevant to address.]*
  - 3.1. Who are the perpetrators? What criminal organisations are involved in this business? What do these organisations do? What is the size of these organisations? Are they organised structures? How do these organisations operate internally?
  - 3.2. Who are the victims of these crimes? Is there a specific profile that has a higher risk?
  - 3.3. Where are these crimes committed? In brothels? On platforms? Through social networks?
  - 3.4. Who benefits from this crime? Is it exclusively a monetary benefit?
4. How is the situation regarding this phenomenon in the rest of the world?  
*[The following are follow-up questions that should only be asked if the interviewee does not elaborate on those details and it is considered relevant to address.]*
  - 4.1. What criminal organisations are involved in this business? What do these organisations do? What is the size of these organisations? How are these organisations structured? Is there a transnational linkage of organisations worldwide or is it more region or nation-based? How does it work?
  - 4.2. Where are these crimes committed? In brothels? On platforms? Through social networks?
  - 4.3. Who benefits from this crime? Is it exclusively a monetary benefit?

### **Part III. The Nature of Transactions Linked to Child Sexual Exploitation**

Next, I would like to delve a little deeper into the economic aspects of the child sexual exploitation business. We understand that many of these questions may depend on each case and country, but we would like to know which factors may be more common in this type of crime:

5. What channels do criminals use for transactions involving child

sexual exploitation? Cryptocurrency? Cash? Goods (e.g., drugs or weapons)? The banking system? *[The following are follow-up questions that should only be asked if the interviewee does not elaborate on those details and it is considered relevant to address.]*

5.1. Why do you think criminal organisations prefer these channels?

5.2. How do these dynamics change at the regional level? In the rest of the world? (e.g., are they the same or different in Colombia?)

6. How does the flow of resources generated from this type of activity work? Are there common money laundering schemes in this crime?

6.1. How do these dynamics change at the regional level? In the rest of the world?

#### **Part IV. Links with Other Criminal Organisations**

7. Next, I would like you to describe if you consider there is a link between child sexual exploitation and organisations dedicated to illegal activities. You can elaborate as much as you consider relevant *[Include only those organisations not previously mentioned.]*:

- How is the child sexual exploitation business linked with drug trafficking?
- How is the child sexual exploitation business linked with sex tourism?
- How is the child sexual exploitation business linked with human trafficking?
- How is the child sexual exploitation business linked with paramilitarism or guerrillas?
- How is child sexual exploitation business linked to other areas of illegal activity (e.g., cybercrime, etc)
- Are there any states involved in CSE that you may be aware of? Cases of corrupted officials?

*[The following are follow-up questions that should only be asked if the interviewee does not elaborate on those details and it is considered relevant to address.]*

- 7.1. How does the business operate in these organisations?
- 7.2. How is the money flow between these organisations?
- 7.3. How are transactions conducted in this case?
- 7.4. Who benefits from this crime, and how does each one benefit?

8. Is there anything else you would like to share with us that will help us understand how these groups operate either locally, regionally, or globally?

Thank you very much for your participation.

*The interviewer proceeds to end the interview and stop the recording.*

## 5. Ethical and regulatory considerations

### 5.1 Research approval

This study was approved by the Ethics Committee of the Alberto Lleras Camargo School of Government at the Universidad de los Andes, with grade 001 of 2024. The favourable opinion was issued following Resolution 008430 of 1993 by the Ministry of Health and Social Protection of Colombia, which classified the study as 'minimal risk research'. This classification includes 'prospective studies that employ data recording through common procedures'. In this case, primary data collection was carried out through in-depth interviews with subject matter experts. While the project did not anticipate significant ethical dilemmas during its development, measures were put in place to mitigate any risks to the participants. Based on the details specified before, no significant risks or ethical dilemmas were identified that were not covered by the research protocol. The process of data collection and analysis adhered to the required standards, ensuring the safety of both participants and researchers throughout the study. The study also received secondary ethics review and approval by the University of Edinburgh, Childlight Research Ethics Sub-Committee (WBCSE-AHR-24092024CL).

### 5.2 Safeguarding and researcher well-being

The development of this research also integrated a self-care protocol, which is attached below:

**CENTRO IMAGINA – UNIVERSIDAD DE LOS ANDES**  
**Self-Care Protocol**  
**31.07.2023**

**I. Title of the Research:**

How Does Money Flow in Child Sexual Exploitation? An Exploratory Qualitative Study to Understand the Economic and Financial Structures of Serious Organised Crime, with Special Attention to Colombia and Latin America

**II. Objective of the Protocol:**

To establish self-care measures for the researchers involved in the project, ensuring their emotional and mental well-being during the course of the study.

**III. General Recommendations:**

- Separation of Work Space:
  - Designate a specific area for working on the project, separate from spaces used for personal or recreational activities.
  - Ensure that this space is comfortable, well-lit, and free from distractions.
- Regular Breaks:
  - Schedule regular breaks during work sessions. It is recommended to take a 10-15 minute break for every hour of work.
  - Use these breaks for relaxing activities such as short walks, stretching, breathing exercises, etc.
- Recreational Activities:
  - Include recreational activities in the daily routine that are distinct from the work environment (sports, reading, music, hobbies, etc.).
  - Encourage participation in activities that promote well-being and relaxation.

- Non-Academic Discussion Spaces:
  - Create regular spaces within the research team for discussions unrelated to the academic objectives of the project, where researchers can address their experiences and emotions related to the research process.
- Support from the Dean's Office:
  - Provide access to professional counselling through the Dean's Office at the Universidad de los Andes for researchers who wish to discuss the development of the research or aspects that may affect their well-being.

#### **IV. Specific Recommendations for the Scoping Review:**

- Tangential Approach to Sensitive Documents:
  - Adopt a review strategy that avoids delving into disturbing or unpleasant details of the documents being reviewed.
  - Focus on extracting the necessary information without engaging in explicit or graphic descriptions that may jeopardize the well-being of the researchers.
- Planning and Organisation:
  - Plan review sessions with clear and achievable objectives.
  - Establish a work schedule that allows for the balanced distribution of tasks.
- Evaluation and Feedback:
  - Regularly assess the emotional impact of the work on the researchers.
  - Provide spaces for feedback where researchers can express their concerns and suggestions regarding the self-care protocol.

#### **V. Recommendations for Key Informant Interviews (KIIs):**

Workload Balance:

- Distribute the interviews evenly among team members to prevent emotional or workload overload for any single researcher.

## VI. Evaluation of the Protocol:

### Periodic Review:

- Conduct periodic reviews of the self-care protocol to ensure its effectiveness and relevance.
- Adjust and update the measures as needed based on the emerging needs of the researchers and the phases of the project.

This self-care protocol should be regarded as a living document, subject to continuous revisions and improvements based on the experiences and needs of the research team.

## 6. Study advisory committee and peer review

- **Milena Echeverry Campuzano** – Coordinator of the Information System for Security and Coexistence (SISC) and leader of the Sexual Crimes Analysis Unit (UADS) at the Mayor’s Office of Medellín. Participated as an independent researcher in the review of the results of the study and the opportunities to generate impact pathways.
- **Angélica Garzón** – Major of the Colombian National Police in the Directorate of Criminal Investigation and Interpol. Participated in the selection and follow-up of expert interviews.

## 7. Data management

The information used for this research was securely stored on servers at the Universidad de los Andes. For the scoping review, no additional data security measures were implemented, as the information is publicly available and does not contain sensitive content or personal identifiers. In the case of the interviews, recordings were stored on the university's servers and transcribed using Teams and Google Gemini 1.5 Pro. Participants' identities were anonymised, with their names replaced by a unique tracking code,

which was used for all subsequent analyses and reporting of results. Prior to the interviews, participants were also instructed not to disclose any information that could potentially identify them or compromise ongoing police investigations.

## 8. References

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