

TECHNICAL NOTE



The Global Scale and Nature of CSAM Online

INTO THE LIGHT

Childlight global index of child sexual exploitation and abuse prevalence

Introduction

Child sexual abuse material (CSAM) is a significant part of the sexual abuse of children online, as well as evidence 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). This data often provides insights into groups that due to methodological and ethical reasons are not usually covered by population surveys. By investigating its nature and prevalence online, this may provide greater understanding into the long-term harms that victims of sexual abuse and exploitation face, casting light on a much-needed part of the landscape to understanding the nature and magnitude of child sexual exploitation and abuse. Additionally, it may provide insight into the current risks that children face both online and in person.

Data Collection

The data collection process included an online scoping of organisations committed to the analysis and receipt of reports of CSAM from around the world. From this review, five organisations including the Internet Watch Foundation (IWF), INHOPE, the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC), The Canadian Centre for Child Protection (C3P), and Interpol/Every Child Protected Against Trafficking (ECPAT) were chosen, based on their mission, scope and data availability. These organisations have all published public reports on the availability and distribution of material in the last five years which allows for a comparative analysis. They are also some of the only organisations that are able to provide evidence-based analysis of the sensitive content, owing to their permissions and mandates.

Three of the five organisations publish annual reports concerning CSAM: IWF, INHOPE, and NCMEC. The remaining two organisations, C3P and Interpol/ ECPAT, publish individual reports concerning their analysis of CSAM data retroactively. The most recent available reports from each organisation were used. As NCMEC does not provide CSAM characteristics in their annual report, a supplemental report from 2019 was used to gather further detail concerning the analysed CSAM reported to NCMEC.

Data Analysis

Childlight obtained access to the reports using the websites for each organisation, where the information was typically published in a PDF format. The researcher read through each report, extracting numerical data on the sharing, detection, and characteristics of CSAM in each dataset. The researcher also gathered data concerning the information sources and outputs for each organisation, as provided in the reports 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 two members of the Childlight staff and are detailed in Appendix I. 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 it was not appropriate to compare the volume of material or the sum total of individual data points. Rather, Childlight chose to provide percentages for each of the common characteristics based on that organisation's total dataset. This was decided as it provides more comparable numbers and in part accounts for the differences in processing and collection of information. It also takes into consideration that a drop in total CSAM detection can actually reflect new encryption technology or a decrease in organisational capacity and, that alternatively, any increase may be due to better detection and awareness.

Childlight gathered data from each report on the countries/jurisdictions where the reports/notices regarding CSAM were sent, often this was based on the assessed internet host country location. In certain cases, reports were sent based 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. The reports frequently calculated their own percentages, which were specifically available in the IWF, INHOPE and C3P 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 NCMEC's country level data which were reported as the numbers of reports sent to each country only. The calculation formula is detailed in Appendix II. Childlight then organized the countries by World Regions, according to UNICEF's Regional Office Classification. Following this organisation, Childlight calculated the percentages of reports or notices sent to each region based on the countries included in each of the reports. This calculation and included countries can be found in Appendix IV. A further calculation of CSAM hosting rate was provided through a division of the aforementioned percentages of CSAM report/notices per region by the calculated percentages of world population for the UNICEF world 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 2022 on country-level population estimates, which were grouped and added together by UNICEF region. The regional population totals were

then divided by 1000 in order to achieve a rate of reports/notices received per 1000 people. This was then divided by the previously 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. See Appendix V.

In addition to calculating some of the percentages based on the reported numbers, Childlight has aimed to consolidate terminology across the five data sources to create greater harmony and enable comparison, and to help understand genuine differences between them. This meant converting reported age categories from each organisation into the two categories, "prepubescent" and "post-pubescent and pubescent". "Prepubescent" is defined as the period prior to physical sexual maturation and including the early stages of sexual development. To convert this into a defined age range, it was determined this would include everything up to and including 13-years of age based on data from the various reports. This was in accordance with a clinical article from the Journal of Pediatric Surgical Nursing which notes that puberty typically begins between the ages of 8-14 which suggests that having the outer age limit of "prepubescent" be up to 13 years of age, while the remaining ages of 14-17 would be "pubescent and post-pubescent" (Hamlin et al., 2022). It should be noted that the article indicates the age of onset of puberty which typically occurs over a period of years, though we recognise this will be different for every child.

Data from, IWF and INHOPE included approximate age ranges of children up to the age of 13 in their prepubescent and early pubertal age categories also supporting Childlight's categorisation. We have also decided to include infant and toddlers in this category as the data for this younger age group as it was not specifically provided in all reports. "Post-pubescent or late pubertal" children made up the remaining ages of 14 -17 years old and include data for age groups labelled as post pubescent children. When the data was available a metric was provided for content which included victims from multiple age categories, where this was not available it is anticipated that content featuring multiple victims was included in the category for the youngest victim.

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.

Regarding content removal times, four of the five organisations published data on this metric. 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. The IWF dataset reported content removal times only on their UK data, as this is the only content for which they are responsible for sending content notices on concerning 640 URLs (individual website addresses which may portray one or more files of CSAM). The remainder of the CSAM content reported to them is passed on to INHOPE, however IWF will send additional removal notices on content hosted outside of the UK. IWF's reported removal times are significantly quicker than the data reported by the other agencies. This may be due in part to IWF being based in the UK where there is a noted intention of creating a "hostile place" for offenders to host CSAM content.

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 worldwide, or on the total number of images processed. From the total numbers there appeared to be a distinction between content depicting contact sexually abusive CSAM, and illegal acts, and the content that depicted nudity and erotic posing of children or other exploitative content depicting children. NCMEC's sample report, Interpol's sample data and IWF's annual report provide detailed explanations of what types of imagery are included in their severity categorisations. IWF's three categories cover varying degrees of illegal sexual abuse and exploitative imagery in the United Kingdom, where all the content included is considered CSAM. Due to the way severity in their content was grouped, and for the purpose of harmonisation with the other data, it was concluded in consultation with IWF that their numbers were not suited to the harmonisation efforts and therefore not included. The other organisations used a two-tiered classification system. C3P defined its CSAM as the content which was assessed to fall within the criminal definition of child sexual abuse material depending on the host location for the content. All other imagery which they assessed as including children and which may not meet the legal threshold were labelled harmful/ abusive. Similarly, INHOPE had a two-tiered system of severity analysis, as either meeting the international criminal definition, known as the Baseline provided by Interpol, or not falling within this classification.

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 (2016) 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.

**Table
1**

CSAM Severity Classifications by Organisation

Organisation	CSAM	Child nudity, CSEM and harmful/exploitative
Interpol/ECPAT	COPINE Level 6-10	COPINE Level 1-5
C3P	C3P CSAM category	C3P Harmful/Abusive category
NCMEC	NCMEC Level 2-4	NCMEC Level 1
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. As a result, the data may be skewed to represent primarily English-speaking countries and populations due to the report sources and responsibilities of the various organisations.

The research team has decided not to show overall volume of detected CSAM in the index for several reasons. Overall volume of CSAM detected could 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 (ESP, P2P, 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 CSAM.

The source of information for each organisation also influenced the data that the organisations were able to present. 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 and no additional information was provided from the sources. 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 penetration. 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 aforementioned 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 2019 report. Interpol employed a similar approach doing full characteristic analysis on 800 unidentified CSAM series in their database. C3P provided data across a three-year period for their CSAM data, however, only the data from 2020 was used for the characteristic comparison in order to match the other data sets which was based on a single year.

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Link to Registered Protocol: <https://osf.io/285tj>

Snapshot of Included Data

A total of 6 reports were included and 2 additional documents of these:

5 Reports included information concerning country location of child sexual abuse material (NCEMC, 2022; IWF, 2022; InHope, 2022; Interpol/ECPAT, 2018; C3P, 2021)

5 reports included information concerning the severity and age of victims of the analysed CSAM (NCEMC, 2022; IWF, 2022; InHope, 2022; Interpol/ECPAT, 2018; C3P, 2021)

4 reports included information concerning the assessed gender of CSAM victims (NCEMC, 2022; IWF, 2022; InHope, 2022; Interpol/ECPAT, 2018)

4 Reports provided removal time based on percentage removed and the time it took (NCEMC, 2022; IWF, 2022; InHope, 2022; C3P, 2021)

2 documents were used to provide clarity on international definitions of child sexual abuse material (ECPAT, 2016; Council of Europe, 2007)

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Appendix I: Calculations per Data Source

Percentages rounded to one decimal point

1. NCMEC

Severity calculation:

Illegal & Abusive Sexual Activity Levels 2-4 = {Level 2 (1 on 1 + Multiple) + Level 3(1 on 1 + Multiple) + Level 4 (1 on 1 + Multiple)} = 1574

Non-penetrative/Posing Sexual Activity Level 1= (1 on 1 + Multiple) = 937

Level 1 % = (1 on 1 + Multiple) / Sum total (1 on 1 + Multiple) * 100
applied: 937/ 2511*100 = 37.3% (rounded to 1 decimal)

Level 2-4 % = Level 2-4 Sex Activity / Sum total (1 on 1 + Multiple) * 100
applied: 1574/2511*100= 62.7% (rounded to 1 decimal)

Victim Age:

Infant Toddler % = (1 on 1 + Multiple) / Sum total (1 on 1 + Multiple) * 100
 applied: $134/2598*100= 5.2\%$ (rounded to 1 decimal)

Prepubescent % = (1 on 1 + Multiple) / Sum total (1 on 1 + Multiple) * 100
 applied: $840/2598*100=32.3\%$ (rounded to 1 decimal)

Pubescent % = (1 on 1 + Multiple) / Sum total (1 on 1 + Multiple) * 100 applied:
 $1473/2598*100=56.7\%$ (rounded to 1 decimal)

Mixed % = (Multiple) / Sum total (1 on 1 + Multiple) * 100 applied:
 $151/2598*100=5.8\%$ (rounded to 1 decimal)

Victim Gender:

Female % = (1 on 1 + Multiple) / Sum total (1 on 1 + Multiple) * 100 applied:
 $1879/2598*100=72.3\%$ (rounded to 1 decimal)

Male % = (1 on 1 + Multiple) / Sum total (1 on 1 + Multiple) * 100 applied:
 $620/2598*100=23.9\%$ (rounded to 1 decimal)

Mixed % = (Multiple) / Sum total (1 on 1 + Multiple) * 100 applied:
 $99/2598*100=3.8\%$ (rounded to 1 decimal)

2. C3P**Age:**

% Age category in CSAM = (# of CSAM Age Group/ (Prepubescent CSAM + Postpubescent CSAM) * 100 applied to 2020 numbers:

Pre-pubescent: $872/731/913/476*100= 95.5\%$ (rounded to 1 decimal)

Post-pubescent: $40/745/913/476*100= 4.5\%$ (rounded to 1 decimal)

Severity:

% CSAM = (Prepubescent CSAM + Postpubescent CSAM)/ Total verified media detected) * 100 applied to 2020 numbers:
 $913/476/1/511/194*100=60.4\%$ (rounded to 1 decimal)

% Harmful/Other = (Harmful/abusive) /Total verified media* 100 applied to 2020 numbers: $597/718/1/511/194*100=39.6\%$ (rounded to 1 decimal)

3. Interpol/ECPAT**Severity:**

Non-Penetrative & Exploitative % = Sum of % COPINE levels 1-5
 $(1.63 + .13 + 1.63 + 3.63 + 8.77)$

Illegal and Abusive % = Sum of % COPINE levels 6-10
 $(16.42 + 21.18 + 8.02 + 31.45 + 7.14)$

Appendix II: NCMEC Calculation

NCMEC:

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

Appendix III: CSAM Categorisation per Organisation

1. C3P

CSAM: Images and videos assessed to fall within the criminal range
Harmful/abusive: images that do not meet the legal threshold but include children and are believed to be harmful or abusive

2. 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.

3. NCMEC 2019: Used the SAP Scale

1. Nudity or erotic posing with no sexual activity
2. Non-penetrative sexual activity between children, adults and children or masturbation.
3. Penetrative sexual activity between an adults and children
4. Sadism or Bestiality

4. Interpol/ECPAT: COPINE Scale

- Level 1: Indicative
- Level 2: Nudist
- Level 3: Erotica
- Level 4: Posing
- Level 5: Erotic Posing
- Level 6: Explicit Erotic Posing Pictures
- Level 7: Explicit Sexual Activity
- Level 8: Assault
- Level 9: Gross Assault
- Level 10: Sadistic/Bestiality

5. IWF:

- Category A: Images involving penetrative sexual activity, bestiality or sadism
- Category B: Non-penetrative sexual activity
- Category C: Indecent images not falling in Category A or B

Appendix IV: Regional Percentage Calculations

1. INHOPE:

Western Europe % = Netherlands + Slovakia + France + Germany
 $22-31+ = >15 + (5-10) + (1-3) + (1-3)$

Eastern Europe and Central Asia % : Russia and Bulgaria
 $6-13 = (5-10) + (1-3)$

East Asia and Pacific % = Peoples Republic of China

North America % = United States

2. 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+ Laos+ 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 + Turkey + Montenegro + Ukraine / 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 + Turkey + Norway + Portugal + Spain + Lithuania + Czechia+ Greece + Malta + 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 + Belize + Uruguay + Chile + Brazil/ Total Number of Reports) * 100

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

3. C3P:

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

Eastern Europe and Central Asia % = (Sum of reports for Russia + Ukraine) / Total number of Reports) * 100

East Asia and Pacific % = (Sum of reports for Peoples Republic of China (including Hong Kong and Taiwan) + New Zealand/ Total number of reports) * 100

Western Europe % = (Sum of reports for Netherlands+ France + Germany + Latvia + United Kingdom+ Estonia /Total number of reports) * 100

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

Latin America and Caribbean% = (Belize/ Total Number of Reports) * 100

4. NCMEC:

East and South Africa % = (Sum of reports for South Africa + Seychelles + Mauritius + Angola + Botswana + Burundi + Cape Verde Islands + Comoros + Djibouti + Eritrea + 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 + Turkey + 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 + Turkey + 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 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 Calcos 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

Appendix V: CSAM Population Rate Calculation

(Sum of reports from IWF, C3P and NCMEC)/ (Regional Population/1000)

1. East Asia and Pacific: (7349245)/ (2398113621/1000)
2. Eastern Europe and Central Asia: (921786)/(419538102/1000)
3. Eastern and Southern Africa: (393522)/(636623739/1000)
4. Latin America and Caribbean: (3593792)/(660277285/1000)
5. Middle East and North Africa: (4337182)/(498720919/1000)
6. North America: (3225844)/(378777854/1000)
7. South Asia: (10449054)/(1938406108/1000)
8. Western and Central Africa: (240721)/(605380932/1000)
9. Western Europe: (3897136)/(505518836/1000)

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