

SHEDDING LIGHT

ON THE DARK SIDES OF THE INTERNET

Report on
sexual
exploitation
through digital
platforms

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1 INTRODUCTION

“‘Pandemic ‘worsening’ child online sexual abuse”, “The Internet Is Overrun With Images of Child Sexual Abuse. What Went Wrong?” These types of headlines have been more common since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Children and young people in general are using online devices more frequently than before for both educational and entertainment reasons. It is great to be connected online in order to look up any information one might need. It is nice to watch movies, listen to music or play games. It’s also an advantage to have smartphones and be able to stay in touch with friends. But as history teaches us, with every new invention there will also be the possibility of misuse. This is especially true and has never been more evident than with the Internet and with the evolving online technology.

In the last fifteen years, there has been a significant increase in the use of technology internationally. Across the globe, it is hard to find a person without at least one mechanism that allows them to access the Internet at the mere touch of a button.

Exploitation isn’t a new topic to humankind. It has existed for many centuries and has victimized women, men and children. There is no limit when it comes to age, country or background. It’s a global issue.

Online sexual exploitation has developed rapidly in the last 20 years and is even more on the rise with the global pandemic. The founder of “Stop Trafficking Project”, Russ Tuttle, recently spoke about vulnerabilities and reasons why so many people, especially so many children, become victims of online exploitation. He mentioned that the most dangerous vulnerability for young people is when they say or think “I’m a lonely kid.” So being separated from friends and school, like what happens during COVID-19 can have more severe consequences than we might have imagined.

This lightup report seeks to bring awareness to the topic of online sexual exploitation. It gives an overview about the different forms of sexual exploitation online, tells real life stories and recommends further steps for tackling this problem. Furthermore, the report is connecting the global issue of online sexual exploitation to the effort of Norway, in order to enhance the potential of national initiatives to counter this growing illegal industry of sexual exploitation.

Awareness raising is key for any change we want to see. Knowledge about the issue of online sexual exploitation needs to be the foundation for tackling this issue on several levels. This includes listening to and validating the voices and stories of vulnerable people affected by this exploitation, and giving survivors a seat at the table where decisions are made. It also includes acknowledging the powerful voice and potential of young world changers to really bring about the lasting change that is needed by stopping the demand for online exploitation.

Did you know?

How are the statistics coming together?

- Frontline organisations
- Activities on websites and the dark web being monitored
- Data from law enforcement cases
- Monitoring of posts in online forums

A recent analysis by an Austrian Helpline for Children and Teenagers shows that over a third of all consultations involve pornography and sexual harassment. Experts from various organizations are calling for greater priority to be given to protecting children and young people on the Internet.

Child online sexual abuse reports has grown from 1 million in 2014 to 45 millions in 2018.

1 in 3 internet users worldwide is a child and 800 million of them use social media. Any child can become a victim of online violence.

In 2018 tech companies reported over 45 million online photos and videos of children being sexually abused – more than double what they found the previous year.

The National Criminal Investigation Service in Norway (Kripas) have found an increase of 83% of reported grooming cases to the police from 2013-2015.

Percentage of the world's population with access to the Internet (2018):

90%

The International Telecommunication Union (ITU) of the UN: Global and regional information and communication technology (ICT) estimates, 2018.

<https://www.unicef.org/child-rights-convention/open-letter-to-worlds-children>

<https://www.nrk.no/norge/kraftig-okning-i-overgrep-mot-barn-pa-nettet-1.12603961>

<https://www.sos-kinderdorf.at/aktuelles/besafeonline-analyse>

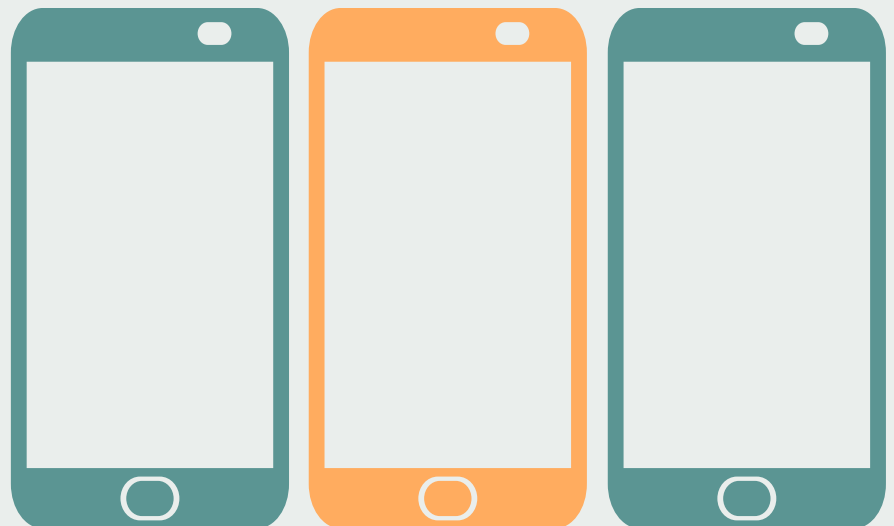
<https://www.ecpat.org/news/new-york-times/>

As a youth movement, we want to see governments and decision makers prioritising the topic of this report as well as include measures that will ensure that the effort against online sexual exploitation is truly strengthened.

Sexual exploitation, on- and off-line, has always been and continues to be a difficult area to measure. The cases are often underreported, as with other forms of exploitation and abuse connected to human trafficking. When it comes to online sexual exploitation, many children and young people might not be aware of the fact that they are experiencing abuse; as some are being abused by those who should protect them.

Arguably, there are enough statistics that show us that online sexual exploitation is one of the fastest growing crimes in our society. Europol calls the area of cyber crime "one of the crime areas most affected by the COVID-19 crisis". Their collection of data is being gathered from frontline organizations, activities on different networks and also the dark web, data from law enforcement cases as well as posts in different online forums.

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is important to mention in this chapter. "In 2018, 96% of the world's population lived within reach of a mobile-cellular signal, and 90% of people could access the Internet through a third generation (3G) or higher-quality network." In their report, they refer to a variety of data gathered from frontline organizations, activities on different networks and also the dark web, data from law enforcement cases as well as posts in different online forums.



The world is being provided with an all accessible online service that makes globalization possible. The downside is that through smartphones and other technologies vulnerable groups are becoming even more vulnerable.

According to UNICEF, 50% of the world's children experience violence every year. This has been confirmed by a large study in 2016, published in *Pediatrics*, the official journal of the American Academy of Pediatrics, where a group of researchers compiled the results of 38 reports with data for 96 countries on the annual prevalence of violence against children. Their study showed that 50% or more of children in Asia, Africa, and Northern America experienced past-year violence. Additionally, 50% of all children globally, - 1 billion children between the ages of 2 and 17 years, - experienced such violence.



One in three internet users worldwide is a child and 800 million of them use social media. Any child can become a victim of online sexual violence and sexual exploitation through online devices. Child online sexual abuse reports have grown from 1 million in 2014 to 45 million in 2018. This shows how there is a need for awareness of the dangers the internet can bring. Especially in countries such as the Philippines, where poverty can easily lead to exploiting children through online tools. However, the aim of this report is also to highlight that this is a problem that can not just be solved by fighting poverty. Exploitation might be happening to children in all spheres of society, in our Western world as well as in middle or low- income countries.

Similar to the pandemic, online sexual exploitation can be a risk for youth and children everywhere. This is a growing issue that is happening everywhere.

Online sexual exploitation happens in Norway as well as in Austria, in Spain or in the Netherlands. This problem needs to be tackled on national levels as well as on a global scale.

**Similar to the pandemic,
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https://www.unicef.org/media/media_45451.html

<https://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/early/2016/01/25/peds.2015-4079>

<https://www.unicef.org/child-rights-convention/open-letter-to-worlds-children>

<https://www.ecpat.org/news/new-york-times/>

2 WHAT IS ONLINE SEXUAL EXPLOITATION?

“Behind every image, video or screen, there is a real child victim being sexually exploited.”

Online sexual exploitation can be defined as “the actual or attempted abuse of a position of vulnerability, power, or trust, for sexual purposes, including, but not limited to, profiting monetarily, socially or politically from the sexual exploitation of another.”

This means that when a person manipulates or forces another person into doing something sexual, it is sexual exploitation. This can include forcing someone to do something sexually, blackmailing someone into sending nude or sexual photos/videos or to perform sexual acts over a webcam. It doesn't matter if there is a screen between the perpetrator and the victim. It is an ongoing cycle of emotional and psychological abuse because victims often feel like they are being exploited and abused over and over again since their pictures or videos are on the internet or being watched on the dark web over and over again. Online sexual exploitation and abuse is illegal whether someone is communicating with someone older or someone their own age.

The online exploitation of children is being defined by the UNODC as “the use of information and communication technology as a means to sexually abuse and/or sexually exploit children”. The following chapter will be explaining what online sexual exploitation includes.

DIFFERENT FORMS OF ONLINE SEXUAL EXPLOITATION

Cybergrooming: When the exploitation of children reaches our homes



The UNODC defines grooming as a practice where "...an adult 'befriends' a child (often online, but offline grooming also exists and should not be neglected) with the intention of sexually abusing her/him." As part of the grooming process, the sexual predator in other words builds a relationship of trust and connects with the child or young person on an emotional level, in order to establish a relation with them with the end purpose of manipulating, exploiting and abusing them.

<https://www.ecpat.org/what-we-do/online-child-sexual-exploitation>

https://www.who.int/about/ethics/sexual-exploitation_abuse-prevention_response_policy.pdf

<https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/frontpage/2014/May/unodc-launches-study-on-online-child-abuse-and-exploitation.html>

<https://www.unodc.org/e4j/en/cybercrime/module-12/key-issues/online-child-sexual-exploitation-and-abuse.html>

This form of online sexual exploitation is often linked to cases in the Philippines or the USA, but it's happening more and more in countries like Austria and Norway and all over Europe. Perpetrators make use of the anonymity offered by children's chat and/or game apps while at the same time willingly exploiting the trust gained by mostly underage victims. Even simple game apps are often equipped with chats that promise security but cannot guarantee it at any time. Abusers and sex offenders are increasingly hiding behind harmless sounding nicknames or inconspicuous profile pictures. After making initial contact on the Internet, they usually want more: From pictures to contact data to personal meetings. This also includes nude pictures or videos that are later sold on different forums. Before they realize it, children fall victim to cybergrooming.

Far too often these children believe there is no going back at this point, so they go along with it. What needs to be highlighted in this particular form of exploitation is the massive abuse of power that keeps happening in cybergrooming cases. The groomer, - in almost all cases a grown up man that tricks a child into a corner where he or she feels like they are being complicit in the secret they are sharing. That means the child is feeling equally responsible for the contact and exchange that has happened. The child may be manipulated or threatened to believe that his or her family, friends or school teacher will blame them for what has happened and go against them if they find out about the photos or videos they have shared. That makes it hard to reveal cybergrooming. Such cases are rarely being reported. However, this form of exploitation is definitely on the rise. In the case of Norway, the National Criminal Investigation Service in Norway (Kripos) have found an increase of 83% of reported grooming cases to the police from 2013-2015.

Live- streaming and Sextortion

Live- streaming of online sexual exploitation includes the streaming of sexual acts without consent from the victim or live abuse in front of a webcam. Sextortion is being defined as the production of sexual material for the purpose of sexual, financial or other personal gains. This also includes blackmailing someone with an explicit video or picture.



Exploitation via Social Media Platforms

Social media plays an important role in our society and connects people all over the world. Especially in recent weeks and months apps such as WhatsApp, Instagram and Snapchat have been important tools for children and teenagers to maintain social contact. However, the use of social media platforms also holds dangers. Keyword: sexual exploitation.

In November 2020, the Norwegian Broadcasting Corporation (NRK) did a mapping where they over a short period of time discovered 150 profiles on Instagram containing sexualised material of children as young as 5 years. Even after reporting these profiles, Instagram has not taken action to inhibit most of these profiles. The lack of monitoring and auto generated response from platforms like Instagram, has several negative consequences, one of these being that human traffickers and perpetrators use social media for their own purposes with little risk of being hindered in their criminal activity. As a consequence, Facebook and Instagram are often used to contact children or teenagers, often with the intention of exploiting them sexually later on.

Before Facebook became a dominant social media site, it was more difficult for traffickers to find potential victims and also more risky to establish contact with underage victims. Let's fast-forward to our present time. Traffickers and other offenders can find their victims, learn a lot about them, make initial contact and even use social media to such an extent that they can control and manipulate their victims. Online exploitation can often even end in sexual exploitation in the field of prostitution.

Cindy Malott, Director of Advocacy Services for Crisis Aid International works with survivors of sexual exploitation. According to her, social media is now the most common way for traffickers to connect with their victims. She says this can be done through all sorts of apps, even those designed specifically for young children.

A 2018 study by the University of Toledo reinforces this statement by showing how traffickers use social media to quickly respond and interact with vulnerable children and young adults. After the initial contact, the process begins to make victims compliant and dependent. This is not a new tactic, but it seems to work even more effectively thanks to social media.

Persons trafficked for sexual exploitation report that social media was used by their traffickers to exercise control. This includes stalking or monitoring social media accounts, sending threatening messages or spreading rumors.

<https://www.nrk.no/dokumentar/apenlyst-salg-og-spredning-av-overgrepsbilder-pa-instagram-1.15225638>

<https://www.europol.europa.eu/covid-19/covid-19-child-sexual-exploitation>

<https://fightthenewdrug.org/how-sex-traffickers-use-social-media-to-find-groom-and-control-victims/>

Survivors of online sexual exploitation



The New York Times wrote an article in 2019 on online sexual exploitation. It paints a realistic picture of the survivors side of the story:

“In interviews, victims across the United States described in heart-wrenching detail how their lives had been upended by the abuse. Children, raped by relatives and strangers alike, being told it was normal. Adults, now years after their abuse, are still living in fear of being recognized from photos and videos on the internet. And parents of the abused, struggling to cope with the guilt of not having prevented it and their powerlessness over stopping its online spread.

Many of the survivors and their families said their view of humanity had been inextricably changed by the crimes themselves and the online demand for images of them.”

Reference:

<https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2019/09/28/us/child-sex-abuse.html>

With the technology of today, and with the constant flow of new apps, networks, and social platforms, it is very important to have an awareness of how these can serve as platforms for sexual abuse, luring children and young people in vulnerable situations or from vulnerable civil societies into exploitation.

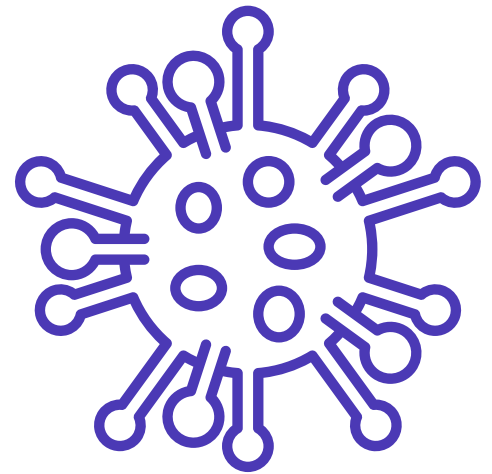
In meeting with today's technology, there is a need to stay alert and up to date of this development, in order to ensure that effective measures are taken to stop and to prevent exploitation from happening.

3 THE CORONA CRISIS AND ONLINE SEXUAL EXPLOITATION OF CHILDREN

“While millions of videos and images of children being sexually abused or exploited are uploaded every day, the vast majority of both victims and offenders remain unidentified.”

Dorothy Rozga, Executive Director of ECPAT International

The Secretary General of the United Nations, Antonio Guterres, in his speech on April 17 2020, appeals to not forget the children during the COVID-19 crisis. During the COVID-19 pandemic, different measures have been introduced to prevent the spread of the coronavirus. Social distancing, wearing a mask and working and/ or learning from home have become a new normal. Especially children are facing challenges regarding their safety, offline and online, during this time. Those challenges potentially include social isolation, lack of peer and mentor support, increased time online, anxiety, stress and other mental health impacts. Guterres points out as well that the increased online presence of children can lead to an increase in sexual exploitation on the Internet. The issue of sexting should not be underestimated either.



The National Center of Missing and Exploited Children reports that there is a 106% increase of suspected child sexual exploitation compared with data from March 2019. In India, there has been a 95% rise in traffic searching for child sexual abuse content and Europol has also witnessed an escalation. In 2019 alone social media platforms like Whatsapp, Facebook and Instagram removed around 900.000 videos and 250.000 accounts sharing child exploitative imagery in India. There has also been made a connection to rising porn use and becoming a victim of sexual exploitation. Manoj Sharma, psychiatrist and founder of NIMHANS's social media de-addiction centre in Bengaluru, stated in a recent article: "Of the 8-10 children we see per week, invariably, several have been led to watch porn online. Typically, they are conditioned to porn from an early age-they find nudity to be no big deal. So it doesn't feel exploitative to them [if they were to be] filmed in the same manner."

<https://www.ecpat.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/TOWARDS-A-GLOBAL-INDICATOR-ON-UNIDENTIFIED-VICTIMS-IN-CHILD-SEXUAL-EXPLOITATION->

<https://unric.org/de/17042020-kinder/>

https://www.equalitynow.org/covid_19_online_exploitation

<https://www.indiatoday.in/magazine/cover-story/story/20200302-investigating-the-dark-web-of-child-pornography-1648211-2020-02-21>

The Story of Raya



Raya* was still in school when she moved to Siliguri (India) into an apartment with her little brother. Her mother had to work in another town. During that time she met her boyfriend. The first 9 months were going really great for her in school and in her relationship. But then everything changed.

Raya's boyfriend started to become violent. From an occasional slap that was followed by many apologies it turned into brutal violence. He also hit her in front of his friends and Raya started to feel ashamed and alone. She stopped going to school.

Finally, she gathered the courage to call her mother. She wanted them to split up immediately and move to her place with her brother. Raya broke up with her boyfriend. But he was not letting her go. He threatened to take pictures of her being unconscious and naked and make them public, as well as sending them to her mother. Despite her fear she left him anyway. So far she has not found any images of her online. But she is still living in constant fear that he might not have deleted these photos.

Reference: A survivor story written on the blog of Feminist in India in 2019. Retrieved from:

<https://feminisminindia.com/2019/12/06/online-offline-violence-abusive-relationship/>

- Name was changed

There is no doubt that the most vulnerable members of our society- our children, are being most affected by the global pandemic and the increase of online sexual exploitation. As we could see in the example of India it is important to look deeper and see that online sexual exploitation is not just increasing because of a pandemic. There is a strong need to look at the porn- and sex industry in general and how they are feeding into the demand of exploitation and abuse.

4 WHAT DOES PORN AND RACISM HAVE TO DO WITH IT?

In order to address the issue of sexual exploitation through online devices, the topics of pornography and racism needs to be talked about.

On the one hand, there is a need to look at the victim's side of the story. Predators victimize upon the people society has marginalized, which means minority communities are a prime target. In porn, the stereotypes of marginalized people are being emphasized and fueled. For example, people of color are being shown as "animal like" with an never-ending sex drive. Porn sites also list performers by their skin color. Japanese women, for example, are considered especially submissive, black women are considered "wild" and are treated accordingly "rough". These images have an impact on the real life that people live. The images that are being seen can make us treat people differently and people often don't question that.

On the other hand, there also needs to be a focus on the demand side. Commercial sex buyers are predominantly white men while victims of sex trafficking are disproportionately women and girls of color. Addressing sexual exploitation means addressing racism and the systems that allow oppression and marginalization to continue.

This leads to mentioning another form of the pornindustry's way to maipulate our demands: Refugee Porn. This search term started to appear around 2015, occurring alongside the refugee crisis. The videos that can be found under this category are often difficult to watch. It is hard to know which of these videos show pure exploitation and which have been recorded by more professional porn producers. In any case, these videos are incredibly dehumanizing and racist, and in addition they particularly weaken gender equality.

Experts at Munich's Ludwig-Maximilian University state that in Germany alone, keywords such as "refugee porn" are searched for as much as 800.000 times per month on xHamster which is the second largest porn site after the porn giant Pornhub. The figures also show that "refugee porn" is most sought after during periods when refugee numbers increase in different countries - in this case Germany. What does this reveal? That minority groups such as children and young people on the run, who are in an extremely vulnerable situation are used as a sexual fantasy in the production of porn films.

Moreover, as already discussed in previous chapters, there are reports of increased grooming and exploitation of children online through gaming sites and social media platforms since children have to stay home and because the demand for pornography has risen. According to Pornhub, one of the biggest pornographic websites worldwide, the demand increased almost 12% last spring.

International and national law enforcement agencies, including Europol and the United States Federal Bureau of Investigation, are warning about the increasing risk of sexual exploitation on the Internet and signs of child abuse or child trafficking.

The currently running petition "Trafficking Hub", that was signed by over 2 million people, has created awareness around the fact that those cases of child abuse and online sexual exploitation are often found on legal pornography websites such as Pornhub, the world's largest Pornhub who claim to have over 115 million visits on their site per day.

It is long overdue that platforms like Pornhub are being held accountable together with their owner Mindgeek for being complicit in the exploitation of women and children. "Pornhub is generating millions in advertising and membership revenue with 42 billion visits and 6 million videos uploaded per year. Yet it has no system in place to verify reliably the age or consent of those featured in the pornographic content it hosts and profits from. In fact, all that is needed to upload pornography onto Pornhub is an email address."



Even in Norway, this petition has gained momentum, and in May 2020, 23 different civil society organisations published a commentary in Dagbladet, calling out for the need for children to be protected from online sexual exploitation on porn sites.

There is no way online sexual exploitation can be stopped without looking at mainstream pornography and the negative effects it has on society.



Here's what you can do

- Sign the Traffickinghub Petition and share it with your friends
- Watch the series "Brain, Heart, World" produced by Fight The New Drug. On their website you can also find more information on the link between trafficking and porn.
- Check out the website pornopratt.no - a resource website made by lightup Norway, connecting the topic of pornography to gender inequality and exploitation of vulnerable groups.

5 HOTSPOT: THE PHILIPPINES

“When humans do not regard other human beings to possess the intrinsic rights to exist as themselves, abuse happens.”

**- Fe A. Feronda,
leader of PCMN Philippines**

Although we want to emphasize that online sexual exploitation is a great global issue, it's also important to have a look at the hotspots of this crime. The biggest one of them is the Philippines. The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) is creating awareness that incidences of child online sexual abuse and exploitation in the Philippines are worsening, especially now with the COVID-19 pandemic adding to vulnerability factors such as poverty, lack of awareness and education on digital competence and the danger technology can bring.

The International Justice Mission (IJM) presented a study in 2020 that gave a clear overview over the reasons why the Philippines is a Hotspot for online sexual exploitation and numbers on victims and perpetrators. One of the study's disturbing findings was that within three years, the estimated circulation rate of internet-based child sexual exploitation in the Philippines more than tripled. The Department of Justice in the Philippines reported that there has been a 264.63% increase in the number of reported cases of online sexual abuse between the 1st of March - 24th of May 2020 compared to the same period last year.

The primary traffickers who lure children into exploitation are parents or other immediate family members. This could be an aunt, an uncle or siblings. Peers and adults who usually live in the same community pimp children to online paedophiles as a “quick and easy” way to make money. They justify their actions on the basis that they need to survive. Additionally, their actions are based on the distorted perception that there is no physical contact or sexual intercourse taking place anyway, ignoring the damage that online sexual exploitation can cause for affected individuals. Many parents are not aware of the harm that online sexual exploitation of their children can do to them.

Approximately 73% of the online sexual exploitation of children cases result in the arrest of a family member or close family friend. The IJM reported that the majority of the cases (87%) involved at least one female trafficker, usually a mother or other female relative.

In 2019, in a large investigation of different countries involved, a shut down of the largest child exploitation site “Welcome to Video” was announced in the news. They found one million users of which only 327 from 5 countries were arrested. Law enforcement found and verified over 250,000 videos with child sexual exploitation content on them. 45% of those videos are still unidentified.

The culturally conditioned relationships between children and their parents within many Asian cultures, places the respect and obligation of children towards their families, and especially their parents in the centre. This also applies for helping parents to earn an income for their families. In situations where children are being victims of exploitation and abuse, such cultural conditions might contribute to complicate and hinder these children to stand up for themselves.

In most cases, those who are likely to be child victims of online sexual exploitation are children who are not protected from inappropriate materials circulating on the internet, making them more at risk and vulnerable to being lured into online sexual exploitation. Although poverty is still a primary factor, there are other factors to be considered as well. Consumerism, materialism, media influences and peer pressure can be major push factors for parents of vulnerable children.

Hard facts:



UNICEF identifies the Philippines as one of the top 10 countries producing child pornographic materials globally.

- **381 Victims between 2011 and 2017 found (86% female, 14% male)**
- **The average age victims at the time of referral or rescue was 11 years old, with ages ranging from less than one year old to 31 years old**
- **90 % of Filipino children can access the internet whenever they want and without the supervision of their parents or guardians.**
- **2 in 10 Filipino children are vulnerable to be victims of child online sexual exploitation and abuse.**

Push-Factors: poverty, Internet access without regulations, materialism, media influences, peer pressure, family culture and obedience to help out the parents moneywise, lack of awareness about the crime of online sexual exploitation

The annual number of cases referred to and/or investigated by Philippine antitrafficking units increased sharply and consistently from 2014 (1 case) to 2017 (43 cases).

Customers tended to be from Western countries, although many had traveled to or lived in the Philippines at some point in time. Traffickers tended to be younger Filipina women, often family members of the victims.

References: <https://www.ijm.org/vawc/blog/osec-study>
<https://theasianpost.com/article/philippines-online-child-sexploitation-hotspot>
<https://globalnation.inquirer.net/190923/unicef-pandemic-worsening-child-online-sexual-abuse-exploitation-in-ph>

The Story of Kim

Kim* is a young girl from the Philippines. She lived with her parents and siblings in poverty. So it seemed to be a good way out for her when her neighbor AJ* offered to pay for her school fees and help her get a job. In return Kim had to move to Manila with him. At first, everything seemed fine and Kim enjoyed going to school and having a more comfortable life than ever before.

But only a few months after moving, everything changed. AJ started to take nude pictures of Kim. That's how the exploitation begun.

"What started out as a nude photo turned into posing naked in front of a webcam, as well as sexual abuse by AJ himself. These horrific images were then streamed over the internet to pedophiles and predators across the world."

The nightmare just begun. AJ started to sell Kim's pictures and had her pose in front of a webcam. He abused her and sent videos of that abuse to child abusers across the world. Before he was caught by law enforcement he sold her to other men that sexually exploited her.

This is just one of thousands of stories. Kim was rescued and is now in a safe home with IJM. But there are far too many children still out there being abused and exploited. We can find them on porn sides, on the computers of child abusers and everywhere on the dark web. Reference:

<https://www.ijm.org/stories/kim>

- The names were changed by the IJM.

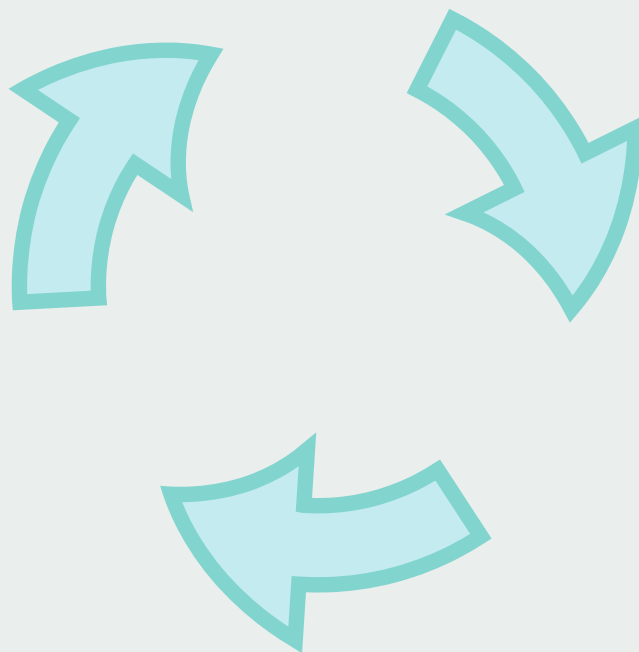
Reference:

<https://www.ijm.org/stories/kim>



6 VULNERABILITY FACTORS, AND THE CYCLE OF ONLINE EXPLOITATION AND PROSTITUTION

There cannot be a report about online sexual exploitation without making the connection to men and women in prostitution. Lightup sheds light on the sex industry that so often seems to be lucrative, legal and sometimes even empowering for those within it, but when looking behind the neon lights and listening to survivors of the sex industry it becomes evident that abuse, neglect, poverty, alcohol- and drug abuse, exploitation and a lack of opportunities are present in most of the stories. On top of that, very often a life in prostitution starts with a story of online sexual exploitation.



Moreover, it doesn't start when someone turns 18 years old. Although it is extremely difficult to quantify the numbers of children involved in prostitution worldwide, research has shown a steady increase, with exploitation affecting younger and younger children.

The connection between online sexual exploitation and prostitution points to the global perspective that should be taken into account. There is an imbalance between economically wealthy countries and low or middle income countries. Women and children who are being sexually exploited in the field of prostitution are very often financially and educationally disadvantaged. We can see an increase of women from Nigeria and Romania being exploited in prostitution all over Europe. Almost half of Nigeria's 200 million population live in extreme poverty. Many of them have never been outside their own town or village, some of them can neither read nor write and the desperation for a better life leads them into the traps of sexual exploitation. Once they arrive in Europe, many are told to sell their bodies for sex in order to pay off the debts of their journey to Europe. They can be found in the streets and brothels of Austria, Norway, Sweden, Germany and many other countries.

The Story of Loveleth



Loveth is 21. She is from Nigeria and now lives in a shelter for victims of sex trafficking in Italy. Loveth had been forced into prostitution for four years in Libya after being raped by her traffickers. She was 17 when she left Nigeria. A madam had offered her work as a Nanny in Europe. "Before they took me to Libya they used two boys to break my virginity and then in Libya they took me to a house and sent many men to sleep with me."

Reference: This Story was covered by "the Guardian" in 2016. Retrieved from: <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/gallery/2016/aug/07/escaping-the-sex-trade-the-stories-of-nigerian-women-lured-to-italy>.

Simon Häggström, a Swedish police officer and author, wrote that according to the International Organization for Migration (the IOM), 11.000 Nigerian Women arrived in Italy in 2016. IOM estimated that 80% of these girls headed straight into the European sex industry. A Study from the IOM shows that almost one third of male and female refugees witnessed threats of sexual violence made to others during the journey. This includes rape (including same-sex intercourse) and violence by those running detention centers or by their smugglers. They sometimes committed those crimes in public as a form of control and humiliation of the whole group. The study also states "Some respondents frequently connected incidents of sexual violence and abuse to women who became pregnant along the route". With regards to this, Amnesty International spoke to 15 women most of whom said they lived in permanent fear of sexual violence. Many said rape was so common that they took contraceptive pills before travelling to avoid becoming pregnant as a result of it.

What might not be a very well known topic when it comes to sexual exploitation of refugees is the issue of sexual exploitation of unaccompanied and separated refugee boys. Very little is known about sexual exploitation among boys in particular; the majority of research and interventions have targeted women and girls. Most of those boys are unaccompanied and separated children (UASCs) who have been separated from both parents and their relatives and are not being cared for by an adult.

In 2015 alone, almost 90,000 unaccompanied children applied for asylum in the European Union, approximately 4 times the number of those who applied during the previous year. In 2016, over 63,000 UASCs applied, 89% of whom were males. Sexual exploitation of UASCs is increasingly reported and visible in public parks, squares, and bars, for example now in Athens, where teenage boys are sexually abused by older men in exchange for payment.

Even though there are more reports and findings on the sexual exploitation of unaccompanied minors who enter into Europe, little is known about what happens to girls. According to Child10, more research and better ways of research is being needed. They report that in the last few years many minor girls are being trafficked to Europe to be sexually exploited. They come with false papers and passports, so they are very often registered as adults. Which makes it hard to get reliable numbers of how many unaccompanied underaged girls really end up in the European sex industry. It's also believed that a large number of unaccompanied minors who are girls enters into the European sex industry before they ever reach any statistics.



The Story of Isaias

"[In Libya] we were in a big, big shed—600, 800, 1,000 people all together in the same place and all treated terribly. When they need one woman to have sex with, they call her, and they bring her out and they do what they want. Many women became pregnant. Many women committed suicide. Many women became mad." –"Isaias," from Eritrea, young men's focus group.

Reference: <https://s333660.pcdn.co/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Libya-Italy-Report-03-2019.pdf>

<https://journals.plos.org/plosmedicine/article?id=10.1371/journal.pmed.1002438>

Child10 is a Swedish initiative gathering and supporting grassroots organizations dedicated to protecting children from trafficking and exploitation.

Read more on: <https://child10.org/>

<https://child10.org/about-child-trafficking/child-trafficking-in-the-world/>



Without the demand for exploited children, for boys, girls and women in prostitution and for sexual exploitation in the porn industry there would not be a need for the supply.

As a youth movement engaged with preventing and stopping the demand for sexual exploitation, our work within lightup over the past years have demonstrated that it is impossible to speak of one form of exploitation in the sex industry and not see the connection to other forms of abuse, disadvantages and sexual exploitation. lightup thinks that human trafficking, prostitution, online sexual exploitation, other forms of exploitation, abuse and porn are connected and there is a need to break the whole cycle in regards to ending online sexual exploitation. We at lightup think it is important to talk about the demand side of the story. Without the demand for exploited children, for boys, girls and women in prostitution and for sexual exploitation in the porn industry there wouldn't be a need for the supply.

It is also important to shift or better to focus on the ones profiting off of online sexual exploitation: the sex industry. A british journalist, Julie Bindel, writes in her story about the porn industry for The Spectator's inaugural U.S. edition: "Annual revenue from the global porn industry has been estimated at up to \$90 billion. (To put that into context, Hollywood makes about \$10 billion a year.)". That's a lot of money.

These findings led lightup to ask the question on how much of the tax money from our own states are being used to fuel the sex industry. It would be important to know about that and how much European countries profit from online sexual exploitation of women and children through investments and equity funds.

7 CONCLUSION

This report hopefully shows and creates awareness on the fact that online sexual exploitation is a global issue that cannot be ignored and must be tackled. There are different forms of online sexual exploitation and the COVID-19 pandemic has made the danger, especially for children, even greater. According to Europol's Director, Catherine De Bolle, the European Union Agency for Law Enforcement has detected an increase of online activity by "those seeking child sexual abuse material" in these times of the coronavirus pandemic.

There is also a clear link between the problem of online sexual exploitation, pornography and prostitution that lightup pointed out very clearly. One of the goals of the SDG's (Sustainable Development Goals) that the United Nations wants to reach by 2030 includes giving all countries and all people around the world access to technical devices as well as good internet access. Although we agree with this goal, there also has to be an awareness of the risks for increased online exploitation as a result of achieving obtaining this goal. As the report shows there is no country that is unaffected by the problem of online sexual exploitation. There are victims among all genders, ethnicities and backgrounds. At the same time we see that countries with higher rates of vulnerability factors such as poverty, lack of access to education, unemployment, marginalization, lack of equality, war and conflict or other factors can easily increase the risk of especially children and youth becoming victims of online sexual exploitation.

This report paints a gloomy picture of the dark sides of the internet. However, it is important to emphasize that despite the horrible numbers and increasing risk of vulnerable children being exploited, there is hope. lightup calls upon each person who reads this report. There is always something that can be done. One can start by checking one's own decisions and actions and then go further by speaking out for those who might not be able to do it themselves. It is possible to hold governments accountable for implementing laws that protect the most vulnerable in our society, as well as standing up for gender equality and for the rights of young people in our countries and communities. Social media can and should be used to have each other's backs instead of using it to manipulate and exploit others.

In the end of this report there is a list of recommendations for the decision makers in Norway. The best possible starting point is for the problem of online sexual exploitation to become more visible, and lightup believes that with the implementation of these recommendations steps can be taken towards the direction of ending this crime in the near future.

HOW CAN THE EFFORT OF AUSTRIA BE STRENGTHENED? OUR RECOMMENDATIONS

Overall, child sexual exploitation is a global challenge that requires a comprehensive response through enforcement, prevention, intervention, and treatment. This report has highlighted the characteristics of online sexual exploitation, showing how it is urgent that governments, business actors and civil societies step up in order to strengthen the protection of children and youth from online sexual exploitation, and to find mechanisms that can break the cycle of exploitation for vulnerable groups.

1 In its 3rd Report the EU expert group toward human trafficking GRETA is recognizing the developments Austria is making toward the fight against trafficking in persons. Austria is stepping up the efforts against human trafficking/ modern slavery in regards of "legislative and policy framework for combating human trafficking." **But there is still room for improvement in this area. GRETA requires a better strategy regarding the support and compensation for victims of human trafficking. Lightup is also pointing out the lack of structure and legal framework regarding the recruitment and selling of children and adults over the internet.** Next to the already existing working groups for human trafficking as well as prostitution, there needs to be an expert group regarding online sexual exploitation. Participation of people working in the field as well as IT-Experts and representatives of young people should be considered. Focusing on awareness raising among children and youth are key components that should be included in this effort.

2 The Norwegian government is working on a strategy against internet-related abuse. This strategy should encompass ways in which Norway can enter into dialogue with social media platforms, demanding that they increase their efforts to prevent online sexual exploitation. Austria should follow Norway's lead and could be a valuable partner in forming these strategies.

3 The major porn sites such as Pornhub function as hubs of exploitation. This report reinforces the need for an enhanced legal framework that protects children from the risks of online exploitation and holds the major porn sites accountable for profiting off of rape and abuse of vulnerable children and adults. **Lightup would recommend looking into better legal frameworks regarding the safety of children and youth against the porn industry. A voluntary filter system for newly bought internet devices as well as a better and free of charge system for parents must be discussed.**

4 Social platforms such as Facebook, Instagram and TikTok should take greater measures to hinder exploitation on their sites.

<https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/ALL/?uri=CELEX%3A32002L0058>

<https://www.ecpat.org/news/eu-e-privacy-sign-petition/>

https://www.change.org/p/council-of-the-european-union-we-are-in-danger-of-losing-the-global-battle-for-child-safety?utm_source=share_petition&utm_medium=custom_url&recruited_by_id=22e1af90-2851-11eb-a791-515174202d1band

<https://www.missingkids.org/blog/2020/we-are-in-danger-of-losing-the-global-battle-for-child-safety>

Pressemitteilung des Europarats 2020, <https://www.coe.int/de/web/portal/-/austria-new-report-praises-efforts-to-curb-human-trafficking-but-more-must-be-done>

HOW CAN THE EFFORT OF AUSTRIA BE STRENGTHENED? OUR RECOMMENDATIONS

5 **Lightup emphasizes the importance of the inclusion of youth in awareness work.**

By educating young people about the risks of online exploitation and including them in raising awareness, they are enabled to be agents of change and ambassadors of prevention.

4 **The major porn sites such as Pornhub function as hubs of exploitation. This report reinforces the need for an enhanced legal framework that protects children from the risks of online exploitation and holds the major porn sites accountable for profiting off of rape and abuse of vulnerable children and adults.**

6 **Measures taken to protect digital privacy, should not be prioritized over the protection of vulnerable children for online exploitation. There is an obvious moral dilemma when it comes to this matter of the protection of privacy of individuals which is colliding with the need to protect vulnerable children from exploitation.**

Both considerations are important, but with the new EU regulations changing the e-privacy directive entering into force within the end of 2020*, the safety of children is at stake.

Over 32 000 people and civil society actors have already raised their concerns and signed a petition against this new law. The possibilities to use all available technical solutions to prevent, detect and eliminate digital sexual abuse of children from happening, will be challenged by this new law, and that is why we recommend that the EU Parliament do not approve this law.

* Edit update: After this report was written, some changes have occurred within the European Parliament.

On December 7, 2020, the EU Parliament voted and approved an amendment to the ePrivacy Directive, allowing tech companies to continue using the technology needed to identify and report child sexual abuse material and grooming online.

However, the amendment only allows for the use of this technology for the next two years, so it is evident that a more permanent solution is needed.

<https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/ALL/?uri=CELEX%3A32002L0058>

<https://www.ecpat.org/news/eu-e-privacy-sign-petition/>

https://www.change.org/p/council-of-the-european-union-we-are-in-danger-of-losing-the-global-battle-for-child-safety?utm_source=share_petition&utm_medium=custom_url&recruited_by_id=22e1af90-2851-11eb-a791-515174202d1band

<https://www.missingkids.org/blog/2020/we-are-in-danger-of-losing-the-global-battle-for-child-safety>

HOW CAN THE EFFORT OF NORWAY BE STRENGTHENED? OUR RECOMMENDATIONS

7 The findings highlight that all efforts to tackle online sexual exploitation need to recognize the interconnectedness between gender inequality, violence against women and girls, prostitution as sexual exploitation and human trafficking in order to tackle the issue of increasing sexual exploitation in our world during the pandemic.

The tackling of these issues will lead us in the right direction towards achieving several of the SDG's, and specifically goals 5.2, 8.7 and 16.2.

UN's Sustainable Development Goals

Goal 5.2: Eliminate all forms of violence against all women and girls in public and private spheres, including trafficking and sexual and other types of exploitation

Goal 8.7: Take immediate and effective measures to eradicate forced labour, end modern slavery and human trafficking and secure the prohibition and elimination of the worst forms of child labour, including recruitment and use of child soldiers, and by 2025 end child labour in all its forms

Goal 16.2: End abuse, exploitation, trafficking and all forms of violence and torture against children

Thank you!

**This report is written by Jedida Sutter,
in the autumn semester of 2020.**



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Raise awareness, inspire change.



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