

SITUATIONAL ANALYSIS

OF

ONLINE CHILD SEXUAL

EXPLOITATION

IN

GHANA



MILLENNIUM CHILD SUPPORT GROUP

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GLOSSARY OF TERMS AND ACRONYMS

UNICEF	United Nation’s Children Education Fund
AMA	Accra Metropolitan Assembly
UN	United Nations
NGO	Non-governmental Organizations
MCSG	Millennium Child Support Group
UNUDHR	United Nations Universal Declaration on Human Rights
ECPAT	End Child Prostitution in Asian Tourism
SDGs	United Nations Sustainable Development Goal
NCSC	National Cyber Security Centre
ILO	International Labour Organization
CSEC	commercial sexual exploitation of children
CSEA	Child Sexual Exploitation and Abuse
LGBTQI+	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer
BIPOC	Black, Indigenous, and People of Color.
TIP	Trafficking in Persons
USA	United States of America
UK	United Kingdom
UAE	United Arab Emirates
GNCRC	Ghana NGO Coalition on the Rights of the Child
ICT	Information and Communications Technology
CCI	Commonwealth Cybercrime Initiative
MoU	Memorandum of understanding
CSE	Child sexual exploitation
CEOP	(Child Exploitation and Online Protection
IWF	Internet Watch Foundation

Introduction

The World Congress III mobilized the heads of State, government officials, experts and thousands of activists to move forward the global agenda to stop the sexual exploitation of children and adolescents. The previous two Congresses took place in Stockholm (1996) and Yokohama (2001). The Conveners of the Congress are the Government of Brazil, UNICEF, ECPAT, and the NGO Group for the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Among the more than 3,000 participants, over 150 countries sent high level delegations, including Heads of State. Several hundred young people attended the congress and played an active role.

More than a decade after Stockholm, many studies - including the recent 'UN Study on Violence against Children' - indicate that the sexual exploitation of children and adolescents is increasing. There is also growing evidence of criminal activity related to the trafficking of children for sexual purposes, exploitation by tourists and travellers, the proliferation of child abuse imagery and internet-related crimes. The sexual exploitation of children is fueled by international demand, which threatens children and adolescents of all ages, in every corner of the world.

The First World Congress against Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children took place in Stockholm, Sweden in 1996, resulting in the 'Stockholm Declaration and Agenda for Action', which was adopted by 122 countries. This committed countries to develop strategies and plans of action with agreed-upon guidelines. In December 2001, the Second World Congress Against Sexual Exploitation of Children was held in Yokohama, Japan, resulting in the 'Yokohama Global Commitment 2001'. The Congress consolidated global partnerships and reinforced the global commitment to protect children from sexual exploitation. A total of 161 countries have now signed the 'Stockholm Declaration and Agenda for Action'.

All children have the right to protection. They have the right to survive, to be safe, to belong, to be heard, to receive adequate care and to grow up in a protective environment. A family is the first line of protection for children. Parents or other caregivers are responsible for building a protective and loving home environment. Schools and communities are responsible for building a safe and child-friendly environment outside the child's home. In the family, school and community, children should be fully protected so they can survive, grow, learn and develop to their fullest potential.

Millions of children are not fully protected. Many of them deal with violence, abuse, neglect, exploitation, exclusion and/or discrimination every day. Such violations limit their chances of surviving, growing, developing and pursuing their dreams. Millennium Child Support Group (MCSG) seeks to prevent and respond to violence, exploitation and abuse of children everywhere in Africa

Millennium Child Support Group (MCSG) works with the Governments, communities, local authorities and non-governmental organizations, including faith-based and community-based organizations to ensure that children grow up in a family environment. We make sure that schools and communities protect all children and prevent child maltreatment. We protect girls and boys from violations such as abuse, online child sexual exploitation, trafficking and work in hazardous conditions, as well as harmful practices, including child marriage.

ONLINE CHILD SEXUAL EXPLOITATION

While the Internet has been a positive catalyst for innovation, education, and economic growth, it has also enabled those who would harm children by making it easier for them to produce, access and share child sexual abuse materials; to find like-minded offenders; and reduce their risk of detection. And as connectivity expands, so too do sexual crimes committed against children where online tools and/or services are used.

Online sexual exploitation most commonly includes grooming, live streaming, consuming child sexual abuse material and coercing and blackmailing children for sexual purposes. As technology advances, new forms of this crime emerge. Never before has it been easier for perpetrators to make contact with children, share images of abuse, hide their identity and profits – and inspire each other to commit further crimes.

Behind every image, video or screen, there is a real child victim being sexually exploited. Like other forms of sexual abuse, online abuse can scar victims emotionally and physically for a lifetime. But unlike other forms of abuse, the child can potentially be re-victimized millions of times – every time an image is watched, sent or received.

Identifying and investigating offenders is difficult, as they often adapt technology, such as darknet portals or other anonymous channels, to enable their offending and avoid detection. Online sexual exploitation often occurs across multiple jurisdictions, with victims and offenders often in different countries. Some countries are yet to update legislation that criminalizes the viewing or possession of child sexual abuse material online.

WHAT IS ONLINE CHILD SEXUAL EXPLOITATION?

Online child sexual abuse material

Accessing, possessing, producing and/or distributing images and/or videos of child sexual abuse. This crime is often referred to as “child pornography”. There are billions of examples of this kind of material on the Internet today.

Grooming of children for sexual purposes

Developing a relationship with a child to enable their sexual abuse and/or exploitation, either online or offline. The proliferation of social media, messaging and live-streaming apps in recent years have seen a dramatic increase in reports of this crime.

Live-streaming sexual abuse of children.

Using online video applications to view, and sometimes interact with the sexual abuse of children live. Some countries, such as the Philippines have become hubs for this kind of abuse in recent years, where poverty is causing some parents to abuse their own children for profit.

Sextortion: coercing and blackmailing children for sexual purposes

Producing and/or utilizing sexual images and/or videos depicting a child, for the purposes of sexual, financial or other personal gains. Offenders can be adults or peers of the victims – and sometimes the child sexual abuse material is self-produced through manipulation of the victim.

Child Participation

MCSG involves girls and boys in all our programs initiative to find solution for their problems. We empower them to speak up for children's rights and to take an active role in their own protection against abuse, violence, exploitation and discrimination.

MCSG works to protect children from all forms of violence and abuse. This includes physical, sexual and emotional abuse, neglect and harmful practices such as child marriage and genital mutilation/cutting of girls. Families, communities and authorities are responsible for ensuring this protection. Millennium Child Support Group (MCSG) uses the term 'child protection' to refer to prevention and response to violence, exploitation and abuse of children in all contexts. This includes reaching children who are especially vulnerable to these threats, such as those living without family care, on the streets or in situations of conflict or natural disasters.

Millennium Child Support Group (MCSG) monitors and reports on a number of key child protection indicators Violence against children including emotional and physical abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, sexual exploitation and abuse, and use of violent discipline. Work in these areas of child protection is carried out through data collection, methodological work, data compilation, and data analysis and data dissemination. Millennium Child Support Group (MCSG) also work promotes the advancement of research through the development of joint projects and collaboration with academic institutions and other agencies working at the international and national levels in the area of child protection.

GHANA- OVERVIEW ONLINE CHILD SEXUAL EXPLOITATION

Violence against children is a “silent emergency” of our time, as UN Secretary General Antonio Gutierrez has once said; and sexual exploitation is one of its most egregious manifestations.

Millennium Child Support Group is making every possible effort to contribute towards the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal to end all forms of violence against children. We believe that together, we can realise the right of every child to live free from fear, neglect, abuse and exploitation.

A large proportion of women and children are victims of sexual exploitation, and continue to be subjected to sexual servitude by rich and powerful men who use manipulative tactics involving money and coercion and, more often than not, breach positions of trust in order to do so.

Worryingly, sexual violence has become a fast evolving crime, taking on more sophisticated and technology-facilitated tactics. New opportunities and breakthroughs that advance human progress and facilitate human interconnectedness have brought with them intractable child protection concerns. A new, virtual world, highly unfettered and predatory, has made our children unsafe even within the confines of their homes. Explosive leaps in technological advances and travel have made it possible for offenders on the move to sexually exploit children travelling across continents with little detection.

As a result, traditional forms of sexual exploitation are becoming concordant with modern day practices—evident in, for instance, “tourism marriage” and the increasing commercialization of child marriage.

In the midst of this growing scourge, African countries have begun to introduce legislation and policies with the potential to deter child sexual exploitation. The efforts and progress made over the years are laudable. In Ghana, Parliament has passed the landmark Cyber security Act 2020.

The Law establishes the Cyber Security Authority, protects the critical information infrastructure of the country, regulates cyber security activities, provides for the protection of children on the internet and develops Ghana’s cyber security ecosystem. It is also targeted at positioning Ghana to prevent, manage and respond to cybersecurity incidents in view of our digital transformation agenda.

The internet has become a critical infrastructure and facilitator of engagements for individual users, businesses, and Government across the globe. In Ghana, the increasing reliance on the internet and Information Communication Technology has led to increased cybersecurity incidents such as ransom ware, cyber theft, banking fraud, cyber espionage and other cyber-attacks targeted at critical information infrastructure. These cybersecurity incidents have affected critical sectors of the country including energy, telecommunications, banking and finance and have caused disruptions in the delivery of essential services. If unchecked, it can undermine the security and economy of the country.

The Law also addresses offences against children and the general public online as such acts are currently increasing due to the utilization of digital services and platforms especially in this era of COVID-19. A number of initiatives have been implemented by the government

through the Ministry of Communications to improve Ghana's Cybersecurity development. These include the revision of Ghana's National Cybersecurity Policy and Strategy, the establishment of the National Cyber Security Centre (NCSC), the launch of the Safer Digital Ghana campaign, the launch of Cybercrime and Cybersecurity Incident Reporting Points of Contact.

A 2009 UNICEF Report Card on Child Protection states that in Ghana, despite child prostitution being illegal under Ghanaian law, there has been an increase in the number of children exploited in the commercial sex trade. Ghanaian girls as well as boys are subjected to prostitution in Ghana. The exact number of children exploited by this form of CSEC is unknown due to lack of empirical data. This makes it difficult not only to accurately convey the scope of child prostitution in Ghana, but also hinders adequate protection, intervention and support. Inadequate data also prevents an assessment of the effectiveness of child protection legislation, policies and programmes in place to protect Ghanaian children from prostitution and other forms of sexual exploitation.

The little available evidence on child prostitution in Ghana indicates that urban centres, such as Accra and Kumasi, are major hubs for child prostitution. One report indicates that there are more than 120 brothels in Accra alone, where young children, predominantly young girls, are forced into prostitution. In five communities in Accra, International Needs, a non-governmental organisation based in Accra, identified 143 vulnerable children in the first quarter of 2012, of which 129 children were at risk of sexual exploitation and 14 were actual victims. In Accra, there are reportedly high numbers of children who have been spotted in and around the areas of Osu, La, Nima, Maamobi, Bubiashie, New Town, Mallam Atta, Lapaz and Madina, either working in the sex trade or at high risk of sexual exploitation. With the increase in urbanisation, in part due to a booming oil industry in the Western region, the numbers of children involved in child prostitution are reportedly increasing in those areas as well. Media reports indicate that child prostitution is flourishing at Sekondi landing beaches and other suburbs of the Sekondi-Takoradi Metropolis.

A study conducted by the International Labour Organization (ILO) found young females are engaged in prostitution at various locations in Accra, including busy commercial centres such as the Agboghloshie and Chorkor markets as well as popular tourist destinations like the Labadi Pleasure Beach and the Coco Beach Resort.

The study noted the context of female child prostitution; most girls worked independently, operating from the street, drinking bars, market areas, restaurants and nightclubs. At some of these locations, the girls had organized themselves into groups of 5 to 10 members (prostitution rings). Their ages varied from 12 to 20 years. Given the lack of decisive data on child prostitution, these studies highlight that it remains a very real phenomenon in Ghana. In Ghana, there are certain social structures that create a culture of acceptance for children working, thus heightening their vulnerability to exploitation. For example, in lower socio-economic groups, it is likely that children, particularly girls, will be expected to help support the family. Thus, it is culturally acceptable for girls, particularly from the North, to work as kayayes (female porters) to alleviate financial constraints, including the pressure to acquire marital accessories for their future married life.

As a result, many young girls migrate from the North to the capital city Accra and other urban centres to work as child porters or engage in petty trading. A 2006 situational analysis of vulnerable children in Ghana uncovered that many migrants and kayaye girls engage in

commercial sexual activity as a secondary source of income. Also, "...a high number of kayaye girls are at one time or another forced to have sex with customers against their will. With no real shelter at night, these migrant girls are extremely vulnerable to sexual abuse and prostitution."

The study revealed that approximately 20% of Ghanaian kayaye respondents had been forced at one time or another to have sex against their will. The demand for sex services from children comes from both foreigners and locals. The domestic demand, however, seems to receive a degree of social tolerance due to a variety of contributing factors, including local constructions of gender norms and a lack of confidence in the authorities to act upon the issue. This suggests the complexity of the issue in Ghana and highlights the need to address underlying social structures in order to increase community protection of children from sexual exploitation.

SITUATIONAL ANALYSIS OF CHILD ONLINE VIOLENCE IN GHANA

Prevalence Rates

Although a few studies have been done on child online safety in Ghana, one will say that these researches were limited in terms of coverage and focused only on some aspects of the issue living out the effect of online abuse of suicide and mental health. Considering the complex and dynamic nature of the digital space, it is advisable to have periodic research to reflect the trends. There is therefore a need for a national research that provides evidence of a wider scope in terms of sample size, nature of activities undertaken by young people within the cyber space in Ghana.

A study synthesis research conducted by UNICEF office of research and other partners on the Digital rights of children titled Global Kids Online (UNICEF ET AL, 2016) and a similar study done in Ghana using the same methodology though yet to be published had a number of findings which this paper will be dwelling on in a bit.

The paper considers the particular study because of the following reasons: It follows the child rights framework and gives the opportunity to comprehensively tackle children's everyday experiences both online and offline. It acknowledged the varied contexts in which children live. It connects evidence with the conversation regarding policy and solutions for child welfare and rights in the digital era especially where Internet is still being deployed.

Child Online Protection is possible in Ghana. The real action depends on all stakeholders especially legislature, law enforcement and industry. There is now a considerable amount of international law and international instruments which underpin and in many cases mandate action to protect children both generally, and also specifically in relation to the Internet.

These laws and instruments could form the basis of the call for the review of existing policies and legislations in Ghana to make them child friendly and up to date.

There is a need for greater collaboration action by all stakeholders especially the judiciary to promote the adopt policies and legislations that will protect children in cyberspace and promote their safe access to online resources. Thus, activate the necessary measures to accede to the Budapest and Lanzarote Conventions. Government must work closely with the technology industry players to develop a framework that helps achieve some kind of consistency, share best practices and agree on what should be expected of service providers to protect their users from abusive behaviour and content online.

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

This chapter focuses on how the research was conducted and discusses the kind of study it is, details of the study area, participants in the study, the sampling techniques used, data collection methods and instruments and kind of data collected, ethical considerations and limitations.

General Research Strategy

The study was an outcome evaluation of a project to contribute to the progressive elimination of the commercial sexual exploitation of children (CSEC) in Accra, Kumasi and Takoradi . An outcome evaluation examines the extent to which a project has achieved the outcomes it set at the outset. It assesses what occurred as a result of a program and determines whether the program's short-term and/or long term objectives were achieved (Van Marris and King 2007).

The research was a quantitative one which entailed data collection and seeking information from different categories of individuals, groups and institutions that participated in the project. This research consideration focused on vulnerable populations, as well as people representation from or inclusion of urban slum communities, underrepresented populations such as BIPOC, LGBTQI+, people with disabilities, and those with relevant lived experience including survivors of online CSEA

Different methods were used to gather data from secondary and primary sources, from which major conclusions were drawn using the process of triangulation. Among data collection methods used were desk/report reviews, face to face interviews and self-administered surveys.

Although the research was conducted in Accra and Kumasi cities have a lot of social infrastructure, they are also characterized by slums with indigenous and migrant settlements. Apart from the slums being densely populated and congested (due to large family sizes), the lack of well-paying jobs has rendered majority of the people poor.

La, for instance, is situated along one of the country's most famous beaches. This also serves as a pleasure and tourist site for many holiday makers as well as tourists. Teenage girls and boys are often found loitering around the beach, and usually become victims to sexual exploitation. Chorkor and Jamestown are areas where there is a great concentration of people, most of who are young. Most of the young girls in these communities have either completed their basic education

They live in large households thus making it difficult for the breadwinner of the family to meet everyone's basic needs. Community members are mostly fishermen and fishmongers because they are near the sea. These occupations are, however, not sustaining because fishing is a seasonal activity. One can therefore find a lot of people idling during the off-season. There are also a number of petty traders and food vendors in the communities. Because of the low earnings of parents, it is common to find their children helping them in their trades, even when they are supposed to be in school.

The girls are often at a risk of engaging in sexual exploitation because their parents or caregivers are unable to meet their basic needs. As a result, some of them engage in sexual relations with men for money and other material gains. Whiles some of them operate as individuals, others work in groups in specific locations in their communities.

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As suggested by Cresswell (2003), the priority of a primarily quantitative or qualitative (or evenly weighted) approach to research largely depends on the scholar's agenda and theoretical applications. In order to meet the study objectives, it was deemed necessary to undertake a quantitative study that allows for quantification of data. Quantification makes it easier to aggregate, compare and summarize the data, and allows for statistical analyses. A properly conducted, representative survey also allows for generalization of results. In the case of this study, the overarching theoretical perspective of the logic model, clearly lends itself to Quantitative research and analysis. This quantitative approach also allows further testing of the model's theoretical sufficiency.

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TRAFFICKING IN CHILDREN FOR SEXUAL PURPOSES

Ghana is reported as a source, transit and destination country for the trafficking of children for commercial sexual exploitation and forced labour. According to the Ministry of Women and Children's Affairs' National Database on Human Trafficking, in 2010, 70% of the trafficking victims in Ghana were children.

This underlines the severity of the issue of child trafficking in Ghana. Victims of trafficking are primarily from the Northern, Upper East, Upper West and Brong Ahafo Regions. Anti-trafficking NGOs in the country have identified poverty, lack of opportunities and education, and poor law enforcement as central reasons behind the perpetuation of child trafficking and forced labour in the country. Due to a lack of employment opportunities and social support programmes in the country, many victims live below the country's poverty line and are vulnerable to the "machinations of traffickers."

One report on the state of trafficking in Ghana indicates that some child trafficking stems from a modern abuse of the traditional Ghanaian system of parents sending their children to live with extended family members to "strengthen familial ties and enhance their children's education or skills development." In recent years, children living with relatives have often been exploited for labour.

There is a lack of systematically gathered quantitative information on trafficking in persons generally in Ghana, and thus, also child trafficking for sexual purposes. This remains a major obstacle to accurate assessment of the magnitude of the problem across the country. The limited available evidence indicates that women and girls, and a growing number of boys, are trafficked specifically for the purpose of sexual exploitation throughout the country. NGOs and the media report that a large number of Ghana's children are trafficked into the business of "selling sex on the streets, in brothels and around mining sites, as well as being trafficked into commercial sexual exploitation in neighbouring countries or internally."

Internally, children are trafficked (a) across rural and impoverished areas in Ghana, primarily from the Northern regions and the Central region, areas characterized by high levels of poverty, lack of social facilities and unemployment, and/or (b) from rural areas to urban centres such as Accra, Kumasi and Sunyani as well as to the viable fishing communities along the banks of Lake Volta to work in porter age, begging, street vending, domestic labour and the commercial sex trade. Use of children on the Volta basin for labour and fishing is common,⁴⁶ which increases their vulnerability to exploitation and sexual abuse. Although, there is little information on the matter, available reports estimate that the number of children trafficked is in the thousands

Internationally, the 2013 US Trafficking in Persons (TIP) Report indicates that Ghanaian children are recruited and transported to Nigeria, Cote d'Ivoire, Burkina Faso, The Gambia, South Africa, Israel, Syria, Lebanon, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Russia, France, the United Kingdom (UK), Germany, and the United States of America (USA) for forced labour and forced prostitution.

Regionally, there is concern about the possibility of an increase in child trafficking into Ghana from surrounding countries, as Nigerian traffickers have shifted their focus from

Nigeria to neighbouring countries due to increased pressure from Nigerian anti-trafficking authorities.

It has been reported by some NGOs those girls who have been trafficked from Ghana, especially those who are trafficked to Cote D'Ivoire, are forced into prostitution or are used as sex slaves. Also, Ghanaian children are taken from the Western Region (via border towns such as Half Assini and Elubo) to Abidjan in Cote D'Ivoire.⁵¹ Children from the Volta Region are also trafficked to Togo.

The 2013 TIP Report states that during the reporting period, the government initiated 75 investigations, conducted five prosecutions, and secured three convictions of trafficking offenders. The government is also said to have drafted a new five-year national action plan to prevent trafficking and conducted information and education campaigns throughout the country. However, the TIP report states that the government did not deliver specialised anti-trafficking training to law enforcement officials and failed to provide sufficient funding to adequately sustain government-operated shelters.

There is evidence to suggest that there has been an increase in child-trafficking awareness campaigns and sensitisation efforts on television and other media in Ghana. This has enhanced the understanding of the general public that those who are trafficked are not criminals and do not have a choice, advancing away from victim-blaming.

Despite this improvement, there is still much to be done in terms of educating and sensitising the population about trafficking issues and child vulnerability

SEXUAL EXPLOITATION OF CHILDREN IN TRAVEL AND TOURISM

Ghana is considered one of the most popular child sex tourism destination countries in Africa. Despite national and international legislation in place to protect children from CSEC, media reports indicate that there has been an increase in child sex tourism in the country in recent years. This has been due to factors such as the development of Ghana's tourism industry and the country's relatively strong economy, which have served to attract more tourists.

Ghana, along with many African countries, has encouraged tourism in order to attract "foreign investment and to fund infrastructure development. While this, coupled with a renewed focus on Africa from tourist-sending countries, has sparked tourism growth [...], this growth has, predictably, been accompanied by an increase in CST." Although some media reports highlighted an increase of this phenomenon, sex tourism is not given sufficient attention in government policy and legislation, and updated research on this specific manifestation of CSEC is lacking. Determining how often child sex tourists are arrested in Ghana is difficult given the lack of specific criminalisation, and thus arrests for the practice. This suggests that the true extent of the phenomenon is unknown. The issue of child sex tourism is considered particularly popular in tourist areas in Ghana such as Labadi Beach in Accra as well as parts of Cape Coast and Elmina.

The 2013 TIP Report states that child prostitution and possibly child sex tourism are prevalent in the Volta region and increasing in the oil-producing Western regions of the country. The limited available data indicates that child sex tourists still consider Ghana an

“ideal destination” for child sexual exploitation due to a lack of reporting mechanisms and poor enforcement of child protection legislation; the weak legal and social protection of children in the country enable predators to have greater access to vulnerable children. This was corroborated in a 2008 ECPAT report on child sex tourism.

In 2006, a study conducted by the Ghanaian NGO Coalition on the Rights of the Child (GNCRC) revealed that German, British, American and other Western tourists were reported to engage in child sex tourism in Ghana.

The media has also reported that tourists from the Netherlands have engaged in child sex tourism and that Ghanaian children suffer sexual abuse from expatriates and international tourists in exchange for the payment of school fees.⁶⁹ Significant issues remain concerning children obtaining justice in these matters since cases of sexual exploitation are rarely brought before Ghanaian courts, as evidenced by the very limited information regarding arrests of child sex tourists.

It is important to note that this issue does not exclusively impact girls as some foreign tourists exclusively seek sexual relations with boys. UNICEF reports that there are recorded cases of boys being targeted as victims of child sex tourism.

Male prostitution remains taboo in Ghana, particularly as it concerns homosexual relations, potentially preventing boy victims from seeking out assistance.

Furthermore, the use of children by foreign offenders is not limited to the procurement of sexual services but may also involve additional exploitative acts, including the production of child pornography as some offenders may also film their child victims. In addition, sex tourism involving children and the trafficking of children for sexual purposes are closely connected; both stem from the demand for sexual relations with children and use of the tourism industry, including the transport sector, popular tourist destinations, bars and nightclubs.

CHILD PORNOGRAPHY/CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE MATERIALS

The growth of the Internet and new technologies is creating new avenues of sexual exploitation as these technologies facilitate organised sexual exploitation of children and “extend the reach of distribution networks.” This is due to the fact that child pornography is often produced and distributed using information and communications technology (ICT). Increased access and exposure to the Internet opens up higher risks of contact with potential child sex offenders, unless preventative and proactive measures are put in place.

Recent years have seen a significant increase in the use of computers and reliance on technology in Ghana. This is evident in the increase in the number of Internet cafes, both in urban centres and more rural areas across Ghana. As the population of Internet users in Ghana increases, so do the potential threats and vulnerabilities associated with the use of technology, which can have far-reaching implications for child safety. Reports indicate that there is a corresponding increase in the prevalence of cybercrimes within and beyond national boundaries, including the dissemination of child pornography.

A 2011 report in the Journal of Information Technology Impact indicates that while awareness of cybercrime is on the increase, the crimes mostly go unreported. Further, it reports that the Ghana Police Service, the primary group responsible for arresting and

prosecuting cyber criminals in Ghana, is handicapped in terms of technical training and legal support to effectively counter cybercrime in its various forms, including child pornography.

Cyber-fraud in Ghana has reportedly led to the abduction of teenagers and the Internet has been used to solicit young Ghanaian girls for sexual exploitation abroad.

Research by NGOs such as Plan Ghana indicates that exposure to pornography has become an increasingly prevalent and serious issue for Ghanaian children. Exposing children to pornographic material is not only a form of sexual abuse, but can also serve as a means of “grooming”⁷⁸ for further sexual exploitation. It can also affect the psychological development of a child.

As a positive step toward the development of comprehensive online child protection tools and mechanisms, Ghana recently signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with the Commonwealth Cybercrime Initiative (CCI). The CCI is an initiative of the Commonwealth Secretariat designed to assist member countries “build the requisite capacity to address cybercrime by building legislative, technical, institutional and human capacity through a holistic and sustainable approach.” The MoU, which is focused, *inter alia*, on child protection and cyber security schemes, underlines the government’s commitment to developing its cyber security capabilities, particularly in the area of online child protection.

SEXUAL EXPLOITATION IN SCHOOLS

A number of recent studies have reported on the issue of sexual exploitation or sexual blackmailing of school children by teachers in school settings across Ghana.

Reports indicate that female children appear to be particularly vulnerable to this form of sexual abuse due to local constructions of gender norms. “Forms of [this] transaction include ‘sexually transmittable grades,’ in which sexual favours are given by students to teachers in “exchange for good grades”, as well as ‘sexually transmittable means,’ which describes sexual acts in exchange for school materials, food or tuition support.”

The Child Research and Resource Centre reports that within certain Ghanaian schools there is pressure on girls to perform sexual favours for teachers out of fear that they may fail their courses. There is lack of reporting on this issue due to stigma and shame associated with sexual exploitation. Due to cultural values, such as the importance placed on purity, girls feel ashamed, and these threats often go unreported. It is also reported that there is a lack of accessible reporting procedures. Evidence from Ghanaian schools appears to show that adolescent girls are more vulnerable than pre-adolescents.

Researchers suggest that in the context of Ghana, girls are seen as women as soon as they reach puberty, which makes them highly vulnerable to sexual violence perpetrated by adults. It is important to note, however, that this form of abuse also affects boys in schools. Experiences of sexual exploitation in West Africa are considered entrenched in the often authoritarian and highly gendered school management systems and curricula. This highlights the need to bring attention and efforts to counter the exploitation of vulnerable children in the school setting and beyond the confines of the classroom

A TRADITIONAL PRACTICE LEADING TO THE COMMERCIAL SEXUAL EXPLOITATION OF CHILDREN

The traditional customary Ghanaian practice of Trokosi, or ritual servitude, has endured in the Volta Region of Ghana for centuries. If a person commits a serious crime or social infraction, traditional leaders order that a young girl from that person's family be sent to the shrine as a form of atonement. The girl is generally expected to serve the priest for three to five years. Section 314A of Ghana's Criminal Code Amendment Act 1998 (Act 554) criminalises the practice of Trokosi and outlines a minimum three-year sentence for those found guilty.

Despite this, reports indicate that this practice is deeply-rooted in cultural and religious traditions within certain sectors of Ghanaian society and is thus difficult to eradicate through legislation.⁹¹ This suggests the importance of understanding why the practice endures instead of simply implementing laws to criminalise the ritual. Otherwise, this ritual may continue in another form or underground.

The 22nd Universal Periodic Review (UPR) session report states that "Ghana is committed to continuing the extensive educational campaigns and consultations already in progress to change the mind-sets of persons who indulge in these practices."

There is lack of credible statistics on the number of girls and women being held at the various shrines across the country. This is due in part to the great stigma attached to Trokosi and the clandestine nature of the phenomenon

The demand for sex services from children comes from both foreigners and locals. The domestic demand, however, seems to receive a degree of social tolerance due to a variety of contributing factors, including local constructions of gender norms and a lack of confidence in the authorities to act upon the issue. This suggests the complexity of the issue in Ghana and highlights the need to address underlying social structures in order to increase community protection of children from sexual exploitation

The phenomenon of child sexual abuse has been widely acknowledged across many societies, including Ghana. Efforts to address this problem in Ghana have yielded limited success because this type of child abuse is severely underreported. This study explores the relevance of three cultural factors, namely, patriarchal nuances, (child) rape myth acceptance, and a "collective shame problem," to the understanding of the problem of nondisclosure of child sexual abuse in Ghana. Evidence from an exploratory study provides support for the importance of these factors. The findings are discussed and the need for further research highlighted.

Since attaining independence in 1957, Ghana has remained one of the most democratic and politically stable countries in Sub-Saharan Africa.¹ With one of the fastest growing economies in the world, the country's demand for cheap child labour has grown exponentially.² Approximately 40% of Ghanaians are less than 15 years of age³ and an estimated 28.5% live below the national poverty line.⁴ Resource shortages, combined with an inconsistent application of the law, have contributed to a lack of enforcement and support services which have created a gap in protection against Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children (CSEC).⁵ Additionally, societal stigmas related to sexual exploitation and abuse prohibit children from coming forward to report their victimisation.

Although Ghanaian law prohibits child prostitution, UNICEF has reported an increase in the number of children exploited within the commercial sex trade.⁶ In most areas, prostitutes are between 12 and 20 years of age, operate independently, and often organise themselves into groups of five to 10 members (prostitution rings).⁷ Young Ghanaian girls sent to work as kayayes (female porters) to help support their families are extremely vulnerable to sexual abuse and prostitution.⁸ Increase in urbanisation due to the rising oil industry,⁹ as well as a degree of societal tolerance, seem to facilitate the rising number of children exploited in prostitution.

Seventy percent of the trafficking victims within Ghana are children.¹⁰ Children sent to live with relatives are often exploited for labour¹¹ and a large number of Ghanaian children are sexually exploited on the streets, in brothels, around mining sites, in neighbouring countries, and internationally.¹² Poverty, lack of opportunity, restricted access to education

PROTECTING CHILDREN FROM SEXUAL EXPLOITATION

Child sexual exploitation (CSE) is a type of child sexual abuse. It occurs where an individual or group takes advantage of an imbalance of power to coerce, manipulate or deceive a child or young person under the age of 18 into sexual activity (Department for Education, 2017; NIdirect, 2018; Scottish Government, 2018; Wales Safeguarding Procedures Project Board, 2019).

Children and young people in sexually exploitative situations and relationships are persuaded or forced to perform sexual activities or have sexual activities performed on them in return for gifts, drugs, money or affection.

CSE can take place in person, online, or using a combination of both.

Perpetrators of CSE use a power imbalance to exploit children and young people. This may arise from a range of factors including:

- age
- gender
- sexual identity
- cognitive ability
- physical strength
- status
- access to economic or other resources (Department of Education, 2017).

Sexual exploitation is a hidden crime. Young people have often been groomed into trusting their abuser and may not understand that they're being abused. They may depend on their abuser and be too scared to tell anyone what's happening because they don't want to get them in trouble or risk losing them. They may be tricked into believing they're in a loving, consensual relationship.

Some children and young people are trafficked into or within the UK for sexual exploitation.

Impact of child sexual exploitation

Child sexual exploitation (CSE) can have long-term effects on young people's wellbeing, impacting on their life into adulthood.

Some difficulties faced by children and young people who have been sexually exploited include:

- isolation from family and friends
- falling behind on schoolwork, failing exams or dropping out of school altogether
- teenage parenthood
- unemployment
- mental health problems
- alcohol and drug addiction
- having a criminal record
- suicidal thoughts and attempts

(Parents against child sexual abuse, 2013; Safe and Sound, 2013; Berelowitz et al, 2012).

Impact of online child sexual exploitation

Research suggests that online child sexual abuse can have as much of an impact on a child as abuse that only takes place offline and can lead to the same psychological difficulties (Hamilton-Giachritsis et al, 2017). Effects can include:

- self-blame
- flashbacks or intrusive thoughts
- difficulties sleeping
- nightmares
- extreme tiredness
- difficulties concentrating
- difficulties keeping up with school work
- behavioural problems at school
- depression
- low self-esteem
- social withdrawal
- panic attacks and anxiety
- eating disorder or eating difficulties
- self-harm

(Hamilton-Giachritsis et al, 2017).

Children and young people can feel permanently exhausted:

“He would make me send pictures of myself, very inappropriate pictures, erm, videos of me in the shower, doing all sorts of things, and make me Skype him or use MSN to perform all sorts of sexual acts and I didn’t...I didn’t want to. I was being blackmailed because he said

that I know where you live, I know this, I know that, I'll come and harm your family if you don't do this, and I felt like it's never going to stop. So, it was a time when I was really tired and I felt like I was being, like...treated like a slave almost..."

Digital technology makes it possible to be contacted at any time – day or night. Contact at night increases the abuser's control over the child's life and increases secrecy around the abuse itself. A child may feel powerless, like there is no escape from the abuse (Munro, 2011; Hamilton-Giachritsis et al, 2017).

If children have been sexually exploited and evidence is shared online (such as explicit images), they are being abused again every time somebody views it. As it's very difficult to track and remove online images, it can be very traumatic for young people and make it very difficult for them to move forward following the abuse

Child sexual exploitation online

When sexual exploitation happens online, young people may be persuaded or forced to:

- have sexual conversations by text or online
- send or post sexually explicit images of themselves
- take part in sexual activities via a webcam or smartphone (Hamilton-Giachritsis et al, 2017).

Abusers may threaten to send images, video or copies of conversations to the young person's friends and family unless they take part in further sexual activity. Images or videos may continue to be shared long after the sexual abuse has stopped.

Recognising child sexual exploitation

Child sexual exploitation (CSE) can be very difficult to identify. Warning signs can easily be mistaken for 'normal' teenage behaviour.

Behavioural indicators

Children and young people who are being sexually exploited may display certain behaviours:

- displaying inappropriate sexualised behaviour for their age
- being fearful of certain people and/or situations
- displaying significant changes in emotional wellbeing
- being isolated from peers/usual social networks
- being increasingly secretive
- having money or new things (such as clothes or a mobile phone) that they can't explain
- spending time with older individuals or groups
- being involved with gangs and/or gang fights
- having older boyfriends or girlfriends
- missing school and/or falling behind with schoolwork

- persistently returning home late
- returning home under the influence of drugs/alcohol
- going missing from home or care
- being involved in petty crime such as shoplifting
- spending a lot of time at hotels or places of concern, such as known brothels
- not knowing where they are, because they have been trafficked around the country (Department for Education, 2017).

Physical signs include:

- unexplained physical injuries and other signs of physical abuse
- changed physical appearance - for example, weight loss
- scars from self-harm (Department for Education, 2017).

Repeat sexually transmitted infections, pregnancy and terminations can also be a sign of CSE (Coffey and Lloyd, 2014).

Risks and vulnerability factors

Child sexual exploitation can happen to any child or young person. But research has identified certain factors that may make a child or young person more vulnerable to CSE. These include:

- low self-esteem or self-confidence
- lacking friends from the same age group
- being a young carer
- being in or leaving care
- a history of abuse, particularly sexual abuse
- recent bereavement or loss
- homelessness
- links to a gang through relatives, peers or intimate relationships
- living in a gang-affected neighbourhood (Department for Education, 2017).

There are some factors affecting LGBTQ+ children and young people that can put them at risk of sexual exploitation. For example, they don't always receive relevant sex and relationships education and may not be able to find safe spaces where they can meet peers. If the young person feels isolated and unsupported, they may go online and/or build relationships with strangers. This can mean they are more easily influenced by exploitative adults (Barnardo's, 2016).

Perpetrators of child sexual exploitation

CSE can be perpetrated by:

- individuals or groups
- males or females
- children or adults.

The abuse can be a one-off occurrence or a series of incidents over time and range from opportunistic to complex organised abuse (Department for Education, 2017).

Identifying perpetrators is difficult because:

- data isn't always recorded or is inconsistent or incomplete
- children and young people may only know their abuser by an alias, nickname or appearance
- victims may be 'passed between' abusers and assaulted by multiple perpetrators
- children and young people are often moved from location to location and abused in each place
- young people may be given alcohol or drugs, so may not remember details clearly (Bereelowitz et al, 2012).

People who sexually exploit children are often described as highly manipulative individuals. They exert power over young people through physical violence, emotional blackmail or financial pressure, for example holding them in debt.

Perpetrators may use one victim to gain access to others, persuading or forcing a child or young person to bring their friends along to pre-arranged meetings or 'parties'. In some cases, if a child or young person tries to break free, the perpetrator will use their peers to draw them back in (Child Exploitation and Online Protection command (CEOP), 2011).

Responding to child sexual exploitation

Reporting

If you think a child is in immediate danger, contact the police on **999**. If you're worried about a child but they are not in immediate danger, you should share your concerns.

- **Contact your local child protection services.** Their contact details can be found on the website for the local authority the child lives in.
- **Contact the police.**

Services will risk assess the situation and take action to protect the child as appropriate either through statutory involvement or other support. This may include making a referral to the local authority.

Removing explicit images

You should take steps to report and remove evidence of online child sexual exploitation, such as explicit images.

- Report the image to the site or network hosting it.
- Contact the [Internet Watch Foundation \(IWF\)](#).
- Children and young people can [use Childline's Report Remove tool](#).

Assessment

When assessing the risk of CSE, it's important for professionals to:

- take a collaborative and supportive approach
- remember that the victim is not to blame
- use professional judgement
- gather as much narrative information as possible - this helps to see the bigger picture and understand risk and protective factors
- include all potential indicators of risk such as:
 - online/social media communication
 - gaming
 - drug and/or alcohol use
 - gang involvement
 - deprivation/poverty
 - disability
 - sexual interests and attitudes
- focus on factors that may put a child at risk of harm, rather than assessing incidents that have already taken place
- make sure the tool you're using is appropriate for the child (some risk assessment tools don't contain indicators for boys, younger children and disabled children)
- look at protective factors or strengths of young people, their families and their immediate environment
- make sure professionals are trained to assess the risk of CSE - it may also be useful to provide lists of risk and protective indicators to help less experienced staff (Brown et al, 2017).

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