



12th SAFE ONLINE GLOBAL KNOWLEDGE EXCHANGE WEBINAR

Latest Data and Trends on Online Child Sexual Exploitation and Abuse

22 July 2021

RECAP (The full recording and available slides can be accessed [here](#))

Background

The Knowledge Exchange Global Webinars hosted by End Violence are a 'community space' where grantees can share the progress they have made, as well as challenges they are facing. These webinars are evolving to address technical issues and capacity needs of the grantee community with topics chosen based on key gaps/priorities, and feedback from the grantees. This 12th global webinar focused on the latest data and trends on Online Child Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (OCSEA) within the current pandemic and technical experts, Jen Newman, Executive Director, USA National Center for Missing & Exploited Children; Signy Arnason, Associate Executive Director, Canadian Centre for Child Protection; and Michael Salter, Associate Professor of Criminology, University of New South Wales, Australia presented their latest reports, findings and data on OCSEA to the Safe Online grantee community. Their presentations are summarised below:

Unpacking the 2020 NCMEC CyberTipline data, trends and reporting (Jen Newman, Executive Director at the USA National Center for Missing & Exploited Children).

With a brief background on NCMEC's mission and objectives, Jen Newman presented on NCMEC's response to child sexual exploitation with a specific focus on CyberTipline which is the United States reporting mechanism for suspected child sexual exploitation.

Explaining the CyberTipline workflow, Jen noted that reports from public or from electronic service providers (ESPs) are received by NCMEC and are prioritized as Priority 1 (child in imminent danger), Priority 2 (impending danger to a child) and Priority 3 (no immediate danger to a child). NCMEC processes these reports and escalate them accordingly to the law enforcement authorities. The presentation highlighted the data trends and patterns of 2020: (i) unpredictable reporting was challenging in terms of reports from public doubled from around 150,000 in 2019 to around 300,000 in 2020 with a lot more engagement in online CSEA and therefore more reporting of incidences as compared to reports from ESPs which did not show a drastic increase from 2019 but constituted the vast majority of reports received by NCMEC; (ii) layering of different reporting categories made it challenging to linearly distinguish between the different types of reports without potentially under-reporting in other categories although there was a 28 percent increase in reports in every category from 2019 to 2020 - of note there was a 98 percent increase in reporting on online enticement of children for sexual acts and 148 percent increase in reporting on child sexual molestation which is in line with the lockdowns and in-house quarantines that happened across countries in 2020; (iii) reporting volume went up between 2018 and 2020 with a lot of viral incidences and recirculation of child sexual abuse material (CSAM) that led NCMEC to create an in-house viral team to do a number of public service announcements to stop the recirculation of the images and encourage public reporting to CyberTipline. The top reporting ESPs in 2020 were Facebook/Instagram/WhatsApp followed by Google and SnapChat among others. The volume of CyberTipline referrals across countries in 2020 was high with 94 percent of reports having an international nexus. NCMEC uses the Case Management Tool to refer the reports internationally to national police services in 80 countries which further allows for intra-country referrals and to US federal law enforcement liaisons in 57 countries.

More detailed reporting on countries or ESPs can be accessed on:

<https://www.missingkids.org/gethelpnow/cybertipline#bythenumbers>



Comments and Q&A

- **Comment 1:** *Online CSEA is a global issue and requires commitment and collaboration across all stakeholders.*
- **Response:** NCMEC also has analysts funded by Australia and United Kingdom that help to respond to the volume of reporting internationally. NCMEC is also starting a new project with International Justice Mission with two analysts dedicated for reporting on online CSEA in Phillipines and Malaysia.
- **Comment 2:** *Currently, ESPs do not have standard obligations on reporting. On reporting volume, Facebook can be considered a better actor than other ESPs who are far less proactive.*
- **Response:** Industry as a whole can step up and respond better on reporting. We also need to be mindful of tech industry reporting responsibility in terms of good reporting which needs to be meaningful, actionable and valuable to law enforcement agencies and not reporting for fulfilling obligations.
- **Question 1:** *Was Facebook's breakdown of their reporting useful? It would be useful to see greater details in reporting from ESPs.*
- **Answer 1:** Many of the Facebook reports, especially their escalations, are very useful reports that have led to the recovery of children. They are reporting online enticement incidents as well as CSAM, which is allowing for a better response, and hopefully, prevention of CSEA in that regard.
- **Question 2:** *It would also be particularly interesting to see report type by country - are different types of reports more or less prevalent in certain countries or regions? That could help inform in-country interventions.*
- **Answer 2:** Historically, when there are questions about specific countries, NCMEC refers to the law enforcement agency who receives the CyberTipline reports in each of those countries. However, we need to be mindful that what is illegal in the United States may not be considered illegal in that specific country
- **Question 3:** *What is the impact of Facebook's shutdown of reporting in the EU?*
- **Answer 3:** Regarding the EU, yes, the EU directive is/was very concerning and essentially would lead to turn a blind eye to CSE in the EU. Here is a link to NCMEC's efforts: <https://www.missingkids.org/content/ncmec/en/blog/2020/we-are-in-danger-of-losing-the-global-battle-for-child-safety.html>
- **Question 4:** *How many countries internationally have the case tool themselves as opposed to via US Embassy?*
- **Answer 4:** 80 countries have access to the case management tool directly and 57 US fed agencies in other countries have access to the CMT.
- **Question 5:** *Are there cases where NCMEC may filter and only send serious reports to a country?*
- **Answer 5:** For the countries where NCMEC have specialized analysts for that level of triage and prioritization (United Kingdom, Australia and now Phillipines and Malaysia), we can do that. For the other countries, once connected, all reports will be referred to them, but the Case Management Tool allows for customized triage and prioritization on the receiving end so law enforcement agency can find the highest priority cases first and per their protocols.

Project Arachnid: online availability of Child Sexual Abuse Material (Signy Arnason, Associate Executive Director of the Canadian Centre for Child Protection)

The Canadian Centre for Child Protection (C3P) is an End Violence grantee and receives support specifically for Project Arachnid focusing on reducing child sexual abuse material (CSAM) on the Internet. Project Arachnid is a web platform designed to detect known images of CSAM and harmful/abusive material and issue removal notices to ESPs where possible. It comprises of various components: (i) media detection/acquisition systems; (ii) media review classification tool; (iii) survivor database/registry; (iv) tools for law enforcement; (v) tools for Industry - Arachnid API (Shield); and (vi) notice and takedown system. Since its operationality in January 2017, Project Arachnid has analysed around 129 billion images; received close to 1 million API requests from the industry and issued around 8 million notices to ESPs with re-issue of notices every 24 hours if no response from ESPs. However, there is a huge backlog of around 40 million suspected CSAM media waiting to be analysed.



Giving a lens to the challenges faced in implementing Project Arachnid at a scale, Signy Arnason pointed out that firstly the Project had issues with the complexity of system when moving from one server to two or more in terms of syncing of servers or storing of conflicting data etc. Secondly, storage is an enormous issue where the media database has been roughly doubling in size each year and have gone from one terabyte of data (2017) to 53 terabytes of data (2021). Thirdly, there are significant recurring replacement and maintenance costs incurred for each new server as media is not stored on Cloud due to the content being illegal and many of the software and systems Project Arachnid integrate with can turn out to be hostile. A few examples were provided on obfuscation tactics such as timing verification and image splitting applied by internet sites containing images of CSAM that required tremendous support from the technical team for resolving these issues.

Signy highlighted the [Project Arachnid Online Availability of CSAM Report](#) released this year which is based on 5.4 million verified media detections and a total of 3.8 million notices to 760 ESPs within the three-year timeframe of the report (2018 to 2020). The report provides valuable insights into the availability of CSAM and showcases the lesser-known internet companies within the wider ecosystem that play a big role in facilitating the spread. One of the key recommendations is the pressing need for consistent, enforceable, and global standards that impose accountability requirement on ESPs.

Comments and Q&A

- **Comment 1:** *Fully agree with Signy - until duty of care is imposed by governments, through legislation with teeth, to compel the tech companies to do more than we are way behind where we need to be. Even the tech companies are asking for regulation so they have a framework to work within.*
- **Comment 2:** *There is some success in the UK with a project/tool called [Report Remove](#), which aims to help teens get their sexualised images removed from online services. It is a partnership between the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC), the Internet Watch Foundation (the UK CASM Hotline) and Yoti, an age-verification service. There is no reason why it could not work in other jurisdictions.*
- **Response:** C3P is aware of Report Remove and have been in touch with the NSPCC on their efforts with the IWF in this space - it is an excellent initiative and one that could absolutely be modelled globally.
- **Question 1:** *What is the role of services provider and platform owner on management and responding the abuse report?*
- **Answer 1:** Following some of the media coverage on the report - we had some providers reaching into us asking how they could integrate with Project Arachnid and what more they could be doing to address online CSEA.
- **Comment 3:** *C3P really paved the way with the survivor voice through their international survey back in 2019 - a survey to CSAM survivors about their experiences then and now, and unfortunately solidified/quantified what we always believed or had heard anecdotally were the impacts of this legacy abuse.*
- **Response:** The international survivor survey and a new protective parent survey is being pushed out (again) internationally. This has been in recent weeks and C3P have had another 50 survivors come in and bravely share their experiences.

COVID-19: impact on the risk of online CSEA and the implications for child protection and policing (Michael Salter, Associate Professor of Criminology at the University of New South Wales, Australia)

Funded by the Australian eSafety Commissioner, the University of South Wales (UNSW) research on [the impact of COVID-19 on the risk of online CSEA and the implications for child protection and policing](#) aimed to document shifts in online CSEA offender behaviour and the responses and experiences of hotlines and specialist law enforcement during the COVID-19 pandemic. It was a mixed-method study involving (i) a global survey of hotlines and specialist law enforcement (77 survey respondents out of which two-third were from the police and one-third were hotline professionals) and (ii) follow-up interviews with hotline workers and police (15 respondents). Michael Salter highlighted that most of the survey respondents reported increases



across all risk domains relating to child sexual abuse material, online grooming, activity in online abuse communities, online risk taking by minors, and live streaming of abuse material during the pandemic. While over 75 percent of the survey participants reported that adults were viewing, sharing and distributing CSAM; users were conducting more searches on CSAM; adults were grooming minors online and minors were voluntarily sharing nude/sexual images of themselves during critical periods of the pandemic in 2020; there was a consensus among over 50 percent of survey participants that there was no equivalent increase in workload related to victim identification and victim support, which remained at pre-pandemic levels. In addition, on delivering prevention and education programs, an alarming decrease in work efforts was also reported (over 50 percent survey participants). In the follow-up interviews when asked about the lessons of the pandemic for the work done on online CSEA, the hotline workers and police respondents called for: (i) an adaptive and crisis-ready child protection system with increased education to children, parents and the community; (ii) technology company transparency and accountability to ensure timely response; (iii) enhanced support and resources for online CSEA victims; and (iv) need for improved data and preventative platform and service design.

Comments and Q&A

- **Comment 1:** *Really appreciate the holistic, cross-section perspective with the different professionals. Agree 100 percent that we need to change our systems, data collection and data reporting to better represent the issues and crime types as they are so intertwined and interconnected now.*
- **Question 1:** *Did the study have any findings on gendered impacts of COVID-19 on the risk of online child sexual exploitation?*
- **Answer 1:** In terms of the data presented, there is no particular information on gender simply because the survey was not gathering case data. However, there is another aspect to the study that will be published later this year on the analysis of dark web offender conversations about COVID-19 and online CSEA using data from Project Arachnid. There is some gendered implications that can be drawn out of this analysis. The vast majority of the offenders are male and there is disproportionate targeting and victimization of girl children but we also see some of the different ways in which offenders treat girl children compared to boy children. The gender lens is critical and we can never lose the fact the CSEA is a gender offence committed overwhelmingly by men and disproportionately against girls.

End Violence Updates

- Manveen Kohli joins the End Violence team as the Fund Portfolio Management Specialist and will be supporting the Safe Online team on grant management with specific focus on reporting and monitoring and evaluation. She has more than ten years of professional experience in project management, partnerships building, monitoring and evaluation with a background in gender and international development and has worked for different organizations including the World Bank, UNICEF, Duke University and International Center for Research on Women in various capacities.
- The Safe Online Evaluation Report will soon be published and available online on the End Violence website.
- End Violence will be soon announcing the awardees for the Safe Online last funding rounds on its website and newsletter - stay tuned! This announcement pertains to the two investments: one is the Tailored Approach for which two grantees in Colombia and Cambodia have been recently signed and the other is the Technology Coalition Safe Online Research Fund for which the grants will be awarded by September 2021.
- There will be a new Open Call in October/ November 2021 and will continue to focus on the main areas from the previous rounds. Grantees were requested to stay tuned on social media and also sign up for the newsletter to receive the latest updates.
- First report from Kenya on Disrupting Harm study will be published in September 2021 and the remaining country reports will be published by March 2022.
- Starting from September 2021, the End Violence Solutions Summit Series will be resumed which not only covers online CSEA but also all other forms of violence against children. Grantees are strongly encouraged to join and host events under this Series. More information on this will soon be available on the End Violence website.