Online Child Abuse Prevention: 
Best-Practices for Parents, Communities, 
and Governments

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Childrenhood maltreatment

- Consists of omissions of care and commissions of harm
- Linked to negative physical and mental health outcomes
  - Diabetes
  - Heart problems
  - Chronic bronchitis
  - Depression
  - Anxiety
Global Prevalence of Child Maltreatment

• Estimated that 500 million to 1.5 billion children have endured violence (ACPF, 2021)
  – 3 out of every 4 children (Know Violence in Childhood, 2017)
Research on Child Maltreatment

• 3 major weaknesses:
  – Vast majority of research conducted in high-income countries
  – Complex role of culture is not fully considered and accounted for
  – Difficulty in defining child maltreatment
Child Sexual Abuse

• Estimated that 121 million children performed a sexual act during childhood (UNICEF)
  – 1 in 4 girls and 1 in 6 boys has experienced sexual abuse (YWCA.org)
  – 91% of the perpetrators were a family member or close friend (CDC, 2020)

• Rates of child sexual violence differ throughout the world with highest rates in regions of Africa, the Middle East, and South Asia
  – Rates confounded by existence of child marriage
Percentage of girls aged 15-19 who experienced sexual violence

Region

Industrialized Countries
Latin America and the Caribbean
Central and Eastern Europe
East Asia and the Pacific
World
South Asia
Middle East and North Africa
West and Central Africa
Eastern and Southern Africa

Percent

Source: Know Violence in Childhood, 2017
Online Child Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (OCSEA)

• Estimated that 1 in 9 children has experienced online solicitation

• Perpetrators can:
  – Create and distribute sexual content
    • Child pornography
  – Seek sexual content or vulnerable children to abuse online  (Mitchell et al., 2014)
  – Sexually exploit
    • Sexually suggestive language, photos, or videos
    • Sexual grooming behaviors
    • Live online child sexual abuse
Problems Created by Technology

• Rates of posting online child sexual content exceeds the ability to for manual reviews of such content
• Increased anonymity of perpetrators
• Many national laws do not clearly codify legal protections for children online
Global Internet Access and Use

• Internet provides a plethora of benefits to society
• 5 billion people have internet access
  – 63% of global population (up from 20% in 2005)
• 4.65 billion people are social media users
Percent of Global Population Accessing the Internet (2005-2021)

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Child Global Internet Access and Use

Percentage of children and young people with internet access at home, by country income group

- **Low income**
  - Children and youths (0-25 years old): 6%
  - Youths (15-24 years old): 8%
  - School-age children (3-17 years old): 6%

- **Lower-middle income**
  - Children and youths (0-25 years old): 15%
  - Youths (15-24 years old): 19%
  - School-age children (3-17 years old): 14%

- **Upper-middle income**
  - Children and youths (0-25 years old): 56%
  - Youths (15-24 years old): 59%
  - School-age children (3-17 years old): 60%

- **High income**
  - Children and youths (0-25 years old): 87%
  - Youths (15-24 years old): 89%
  - School-age children (3-17 years old): 86%

- **Global**
  - Children and youths (0-25 years old): 33%
  - Youths (15-24 years old): 37%
  - School-age children (3-17 years old): 33%
Child Global Internet Access and Use: By Region

Percentage of children and young people with internet access at home, by region

- East Asia and Pacific: 54, 56, 59
- Eastern and Southern Africa: 13, 16, 12
- Eastern Europe and Central Asia: 59, 61, 59
- Latin America and Caribbean: 53, 58, 51
- Middle East and North Africa: 26, 31, 25
- South Asia: 13, 17, 12
- West and Central Africa: 5, 7, 5
- Global: 33, 37, 33

Legend:
- Dark blue: Children and youths (0-25 years old)
- Light blue: Youths (15-24 years old)
- Yellow: School-age children (3-17 years old)
Child Global Internet Access and Use: By Income Level

Percentage of children and young people with internet access at home, by country income group

Low income

Lower-middle income

Upper-middle income

High income

The gap between the richest and poorest households is 54%, the largest among country income groups.

Children and young people with internet access at home (%)

Poorest 20%  Richest 20%
International Response to OCSEA

• Emphasis on inter-governmental collaborations and inclusion of civil society

• WeProtect Global Alliance formed a Model National Response
  – Over 80 countries
  – 20 global technology companies
  – 24 NGOs
What is a Model National Response?

• Assess current responses and identify gaps in those responses
• Prioritize national responses to address gaps
• Support international cooperation
• Responses cannot be confined to national jurisdiction
  – Collaborations include:
    • Council of Europe
    • African Child Policy Forum
Best-Practices: Parent/Familial

• Strongest protective factor for OCSEA is involvement of actively engaged parents utilizing positive parenting practices
  – Focus on respect and interest in the child
  – Avoids excessive internet restriction or punishment

• Parents must remain an integral support system for children even during adolescence when children often seek greater autonomy

• Siblings and cousins can provide essential support, especially in adolescence
Best-Practices: Community School-Based Programs

- Focus on:
  - skill-building and behavior change over attitude and awareness
  - Long term, intensive, and interactive
  - Utilize specific examples and scenarios that children will relate to
  - Trained teachers with access to support and guidance
  - Mechanism to assess learning
Best-Practices: Government

• Foster international collaborations
• Adopt clear international standards for enforceable laws to protect children
• Develop clear plans to assess prevalence rates, identify indicators of successful intervention, and establish a budget (financial and human capital)
  – Interventions should include primary, secondary, and tertiary prevention
Conclusions

• OCSEA is a problem that is expected to grow in magnitude over the next decade as more individuals gain access to the internet

• Successful approaches to address OCSEA must recognize the value of each level within society so that children can maximize the benefits of technology while minimizing the dangers