



MUNES

'26

STUDY GUIDE

UNICEF

TABLE OF CONTENTS

- 1. Letters from the Secretariat**
 - 2. Letters from the Chairboard**
 - 3. Introduction to the Committee and Topic**
 - 3.1. Overview of UNICEF**
 - 3.2. Mandate of the Committee**
 - 3.3. Introduction to the Agenda Item**
 - 4. Conceptual Framework and Key Definitions**
 - 4.1. Child Sexual Violence and Abuse**
 - 4.1.1 Types of Sexual Abuse Against Children**
 - 4.2. Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE)**
 - 4.3. Child Safeguarding and Protection Mechanisms**
 - 5. Historical and Global Context**
 - 5.1. International Milestones in Child Protection**
 - 5.1.1. UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC)**
 - 5.1.2. Role of UNICEF in Global Child Protection**
 - 6. Sex Education as a Protective Tool**
 - 6.1. Evidence-Based Approaches to Sexuality Education**
 - 6.2. Cultural, Religious, and Political Resistance**
 - 6.3. Gaps in Access and Quality Across Regions**
 - 7. Stakeholders, Interests, and Perspectives**
 - 7.1. Governments and National Legal Frameworks**
 - 7.2. NGOs and Civil Society Organizations**
 - 8. Policy Approaches and Strategic Options**
 - 8.1. Strengthening National Child Protection Laws**
 - 8.2. Expanding and Standardizing Sex Education Programs**
 - 8.3. Preventing Sexual Violence Through Comprehensive Sex Education**
 - 8.4. Enhancing International Cooperation and Data Sharing**
 - 8.5. Supporting Survivors and Rehabilitation Frameworks**
 - 9. Questions to Ponder**
 - 10. Bibliography**
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- 1. Letters from the Secretariat**
 - 2. Letters from the Chairboard**

Dear delegates,

First of all, welcome to MUNES'26! I will be your President Chair for three days, and I am highly honoured to have this opportunity. I want to introduce myself to you briefly to begin with; I am Işıl Ekinci, I am currently an 11th grader at Yeni Yol High School and this will be my 2nd Chairboard experience. I've been attending MUN conferences since I was just a 7th grader so trust me, I know exactly how you feel if you are a first timer here.

I am here to help you all with your debating skills, your confidence, teamwork and collaboration; as I also aim to provide an academically enriching committee full of fruitful sessions. I am totally an approachable person so please don't hesitate to reach out for any kinds of questions. It would be great to know that I'm contributing as much as I can. Good luck with all your studies, see you there!

Sincerely,

Işıl Ekinci - President Chair

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Dear Delegates,

Firstly, I personally am really excited for this conference since it's going to be my first experience as a part of the chairboard! Since it is going to be a beginner committee, naturally there will be first timers in our committee. I'm sure you are excited, curious or even maybe scared, what I would suggest is, do your best in the committees and have fun in every chance you have! MUN as a whole changed my life in so many ways, but what i can clearly tell is it was mostly positive changes, so go out there, give your best speech and never forget to have fun and enjoy the moment.

Can't wait to meet you guys there! Until then, if you have any questions, do not hesitate to reach me out, see you there guys.

Sincerely,

Ahmet Eren Süpür - Vice Chair

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3. Introduction to the Committee and Topic

3.1. Overview of UNICEF

UNICEF was created in 1946, in New York, by the U.N. to provide immediate relief to children and mothers affected by World War II. The mission of the United Nations



International Children's Emergency Fund, as it was then known, was to provide short-term emergency relief to children in post-World War II Europe. UNICEF provided life-saving therapeutic food, medical supplies, clothing and blankets to more than 6 million children across the continent. After 1950 the fund directed its efforts toward general programs for the improvement of children's welfare, particularly in less-developed countries and in various emergency situations. From the ashes of war to the

global challenges that affect millions today, UNICEF's mandate has never wavered. UNICEF works to protect the rights of all children, whoever they are, wherever they live.

3.2. Mandate of the Committee

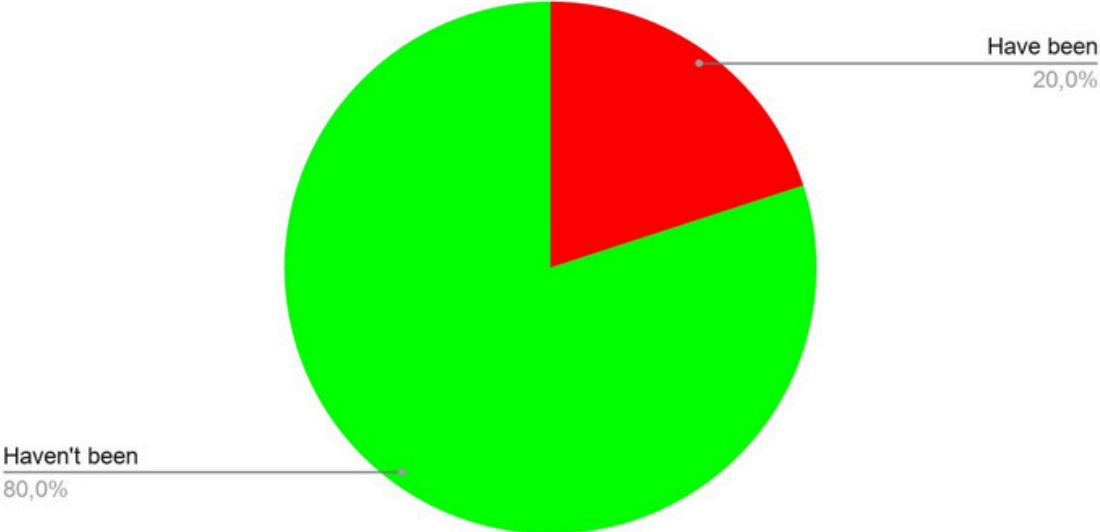
UNICEF is focused on child protection and promoting gender equality for all children. UNICEF aims, through its country programmes, to promote the equal rights of women and girls and to support their full participation in the political, social and economic development of their communities. Child Protection is the prevention of, and response to, exploitation, abuse, neglect, harmful practices and violence against children. It is embedded in the Sustainable Development Goals. Child Protection is universal: it is for all children everywhere, from low- to high-income countries. The vision of the UNICEF Child Protection Strategy is a world where all children are free from violence, exploitation, abuse, neglect and harmful practices. As mandated by the United Nations General Assembly, and in line with the Convention on the Rights of the Child, UNICEF is responsible for advocating for the advancement of children's rights, to help meet their basic needs and to expand their opportunities to reach their full potential. UNICEF partners with governments and communities, in order to ensure special protection for the most disadvantaged children victims of war, disasters, extreme poverty, all forms of violence and exploitation, and those with disabilities. With these contributions, UNICEF plays a key role in various fields to protect children against unwanted sexual acts.

3.3. Introduction to the Agenda Item

Sexual violence against children is pervasive, cutting across geographical, cultural and economic boundaries. Globally, 650 million (or 1 in 5) girls and women alive today

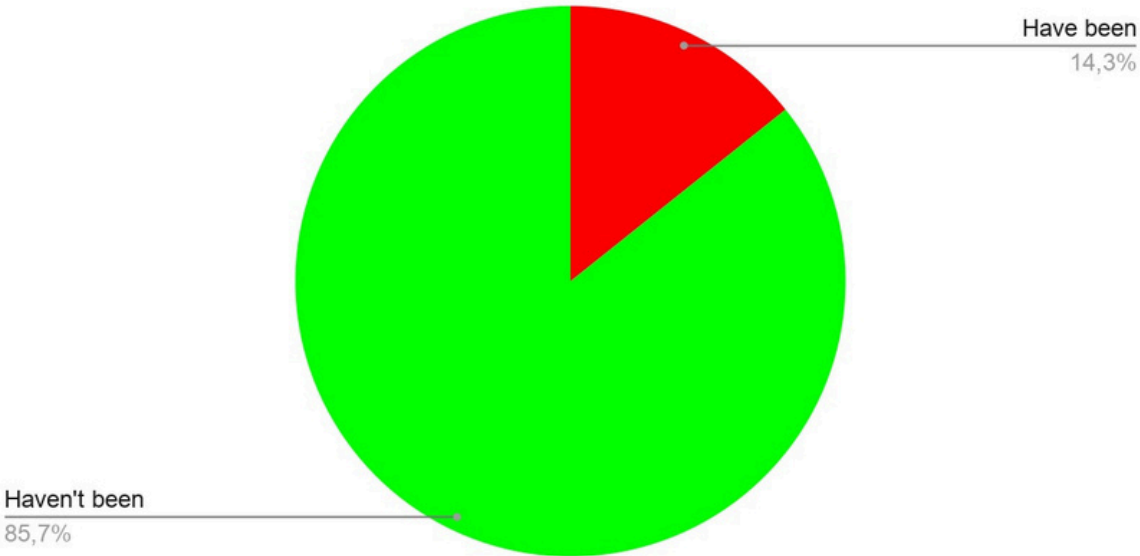
have been subjected to sexual violence as children.

Girls and women alive today have been subjected to sexual violence as children globally



Among boys and men, between 410 and 530 million (or around 1 in 7) experienced sexual violence in childhood.

Boys and men alive today have been subjected to sexual violence as children globally



Sexual violence against a child refers to “Any deliberate, unwanted and non-essential act of a sexual nature, either completed or attempted, that is perpetrated against a

child, including for exploitative purposes, and that results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury, pain or psychological suffering.”The impacts are severe; often leading to injuries, sexually transmitted infections, mental health issues such as anxiety and depression, and in the most extreme cases, death. Early exposure to violence can cause toxic stress, affecting brain development, and lead to aggression, substance abuse, and criminal behaviour in later life. The ability of a child to prevent or report abuse is dependent, in part, on their understanding of their bodies, their recognition that they have bodily autonomy, and the skills to communicate with a trusted adult regarding perceived or real danger. Research has concluded that the majority of risk factors for violence perpetration can be altered through education that is approached from a lens of prevention. Yet sex education is not standardized across states, counties, or even school systems, and a large proportion of programs are not evidence-based or medically accurate.

4. Conceptual Framework and Key Definitions

4.1. Child Sexual Violence and Abuse



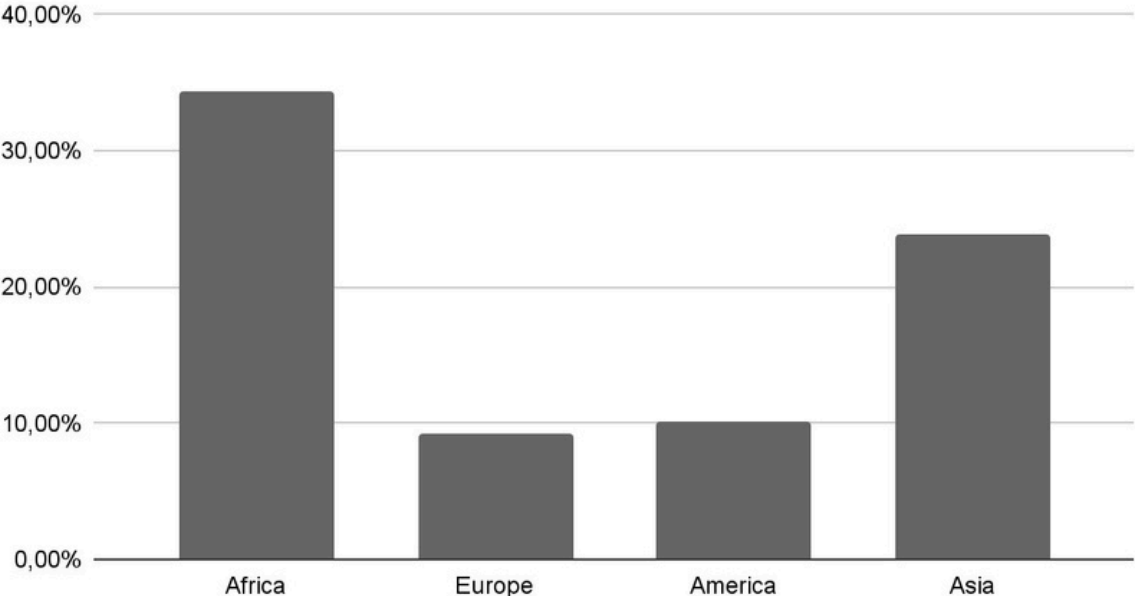
The problem of defining “child sexual abuse” (CSA), and the need to define this concept, has been recognized by major policy bodies and leading researchers since the 1970s. In the education, psychology or the social sciences, any sexual act performed on, with or in front of children and adolescents against their will or to which they cannot knowingly consent due to physical, emotional, mental or linguistic

inferiority is defined as sexual abuse or sexual violence. The abuser uses their position of power or authority to satisfy their own needs at the expense of minors. Sexual acts must always be considered to be sexual violence, even if a child expresses that he or she consents or an abuser interprets it that way. The above sociological definition is more comprehensive than the legal definition because it includes all chargeable acts, but it can also include acts that are not chargeable. The legal definition of sexual abuse only includes those acts that are chargeable. This is regardless of how serious the acts are, whether they take place offline or online and are chargeable or not: Sexual abuse is an attack on a complete person involving their basic trust and their psychological and physical integrities. Sexual abuse results in the survivors experiencing a huge loss of trust and control, disgust, humiliation, powerlessness and shame. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), child sexual abuse involves children in sexual activity that they do not fully comprehend, cannot consent to, are not developmentally

prepared for, or behavior that violates societal laws or social taboos. Both of these definitions include acts that do and do not involve physical touching or physical force, including completed sex acts, attempted sex acts, abusive sexual touching, and noncontact assaults such as harassment, threats, forced exposure to pornography, and taking unwanted sexual images.

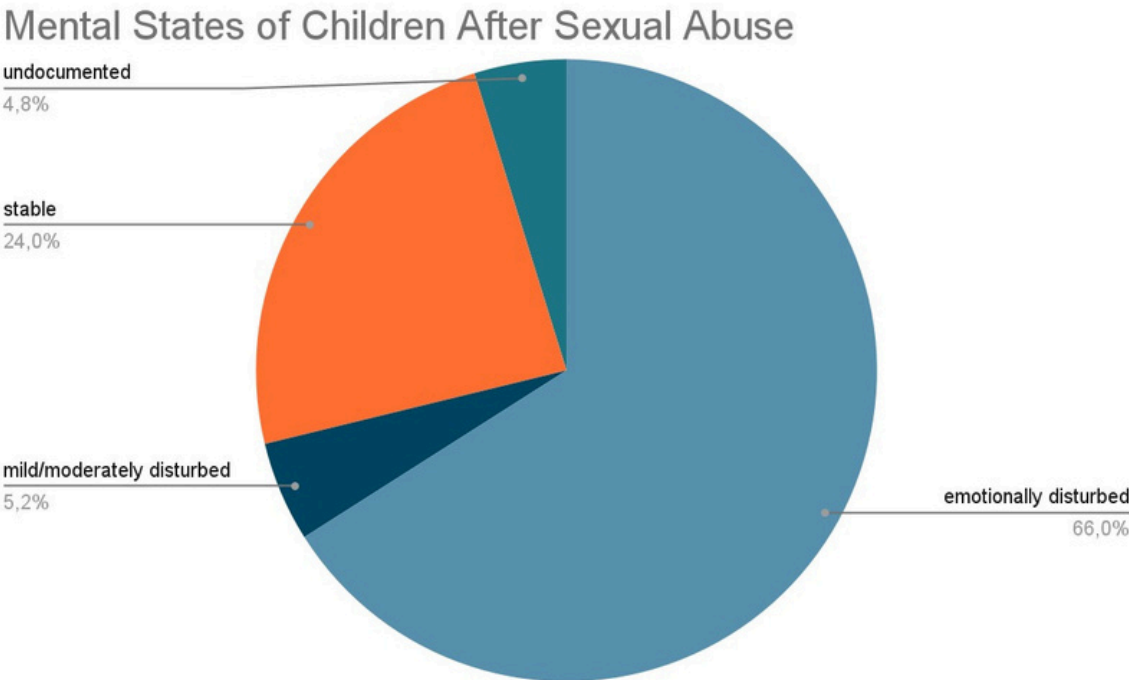
More than 370 million girls and women alive today or 1 in 8 experienced rape or sexual assault before the age of 18. When non-contact forms of sexual violence, such as online or verbal abuse, are included, the number of girls and women affected rises to 650 million globally or 1 in 5. An estimated 240 to 310 million boys and men or around 1 in 11 have experienced rape or sexual assault during childhood, a figure that rises to between 410 and 530 million when non-contact forms are included. According to the data, most childhood sexual violence occurs during adolescence, with a significant spike between ages 14 and 17. Studies show that children who experience sexual violence are more likely to suffer repeated abuse. A 2009 meta-analysis of 65 studies from 22 countries found a global prevalence of 19.7% for females and 7.9% for males for some form of child sexual abuse prior to the age of 18. Africa had the highest prevalence rate of child sexual abuse at 34.4%, primarily because of high rates in South Africa; Europe showed the lowest prevalence rate at 9.2%; and America and Asia had prevalence rates between 10.1% and 23.9%.

Rate of child sexual abuse by continent



About 90% of child sexual abuse is perpetrated by someone known and trusted by the child or child's family members. The total lifetime economic burden of child sexual

abuse in the United States in 2015 was estimated to be at least \$9.3 billion. During sexual abuse, victims can feel fear, anxiety, self-blame, guilt, confusion, and anger. They feel self-conscious and humiliated, unable to talk about what happened, which can result in stress and frustration. Previous studies revealed that 66.0% of children were emotionally disturbed due to sexual abuse, 5.2% were mild to moderately disturbed, and 24.0% remained stable after the sexual abuse. Most victims report sexual abuse in their later life, and these victims also indicate revictimization as one of the most consistent outcomes of child sexual abuse.



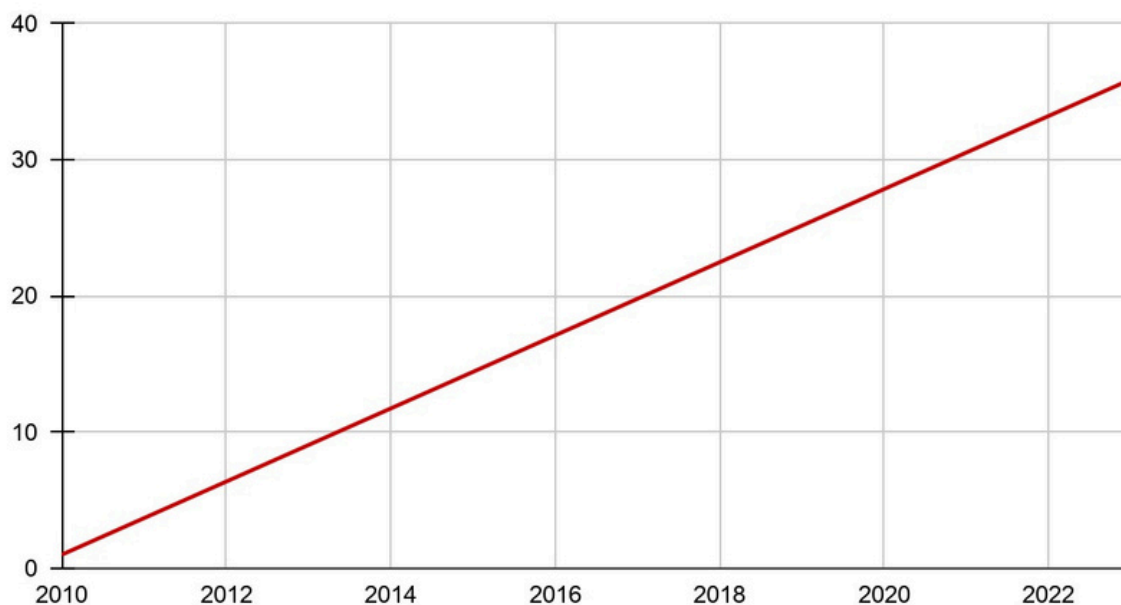
Research shows that many victim-survivors report adverse impacts on their mental health and wellbeing, including anxiety disorders, depression, eating disorders and disturbances, sleep disruption and insomnia, and dissociation. Long-term clinical psychiatric diagnoses associated with child sexual abuse include post-traumatic stress disorder and personality disorders. Beyond being at high risk for lifelong mental disturbances, individuals with a history of childhood sexual abuse are also vulnerable to disruptions in physical health, often developing a wide variety of symptoms that are medically unexplained, including chronic pain, sleep problems, adult-onset arthritis, fibromyalgia, long-term fatigue, diabetes, and circulatory, digestive, respiratory, musculoskeletal, reproductive, and neurological problems. The impact of childhood sexual abuse extends beyond individual health, influencing population-level health metrics and contributing to the overall burden on healthcare systems. Public health initiatives that address the long-term effects of childhood trauma are therefore essential for improving mental health outcomes and promoting well-being.

4.1.1 Types of Sexual Abuse Against Children

- There are two types of sexual abuse contact and non-contact abuse. And sexual abuse can happen in person or online.
- Contact abuse is where an abuser makes physical contact with a child or forces the child to make physical contact with someone else.
- Non-contact abuse is where a child is abused without being touched by the abuser. This can be in person or online.

Child sexual abuse is a growing problem, both online and offline. In 2023 alone, there were 1.3 million reports of child sexual abuse in the EU, which included more than 3.4 million images and videos. Reports of child sexual abuse have also significantly grown on a global scale, with 1 million reports in 2010 to almost 35.9 million in 2023, including nearly 105.6 million images and videos.

Reports of child sexual abuse (Million)



Behind each image and video, there is a real child being abused. Child sexual abuse has life-long consequences for victims. Every time perpetrators share images and videos online, the violation of their privacy continues, often lasting for years. Victims have to live with the knowledge that the content showing the worst moments of their lives is being circulated and anyone, including friends and relatives, may see it. Technological development has also fuelled demand for child sexual abuse material by enabling the monetization of abuse. Abusers can with one click, pay to watch live streaming of child sexual abuse and access dedicated platforms on the dark web.

Technology has contributed to the increase of digital crimes, whereby criminals threaten to expose explicit images or videos of victims, often children, unless paid.

4.2. Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE)

Comprehensive sexuality education is a curriculum-based process of teaching and learning about the cognitive, emotional, physical and social aspects of sexuality. It aims to equip children and young people with knowledge, skills, attitudes and values that empowers them to realize their health, well-being and dignity; develop respectful social and sexual relationships; consider how their choices affect their own well-being and that of others; and understand and ensure the protection of their rights throughout their lives. CSE is important because it provides a structured approach to teaching and learning about sexuality that supports positive human and social development and seeks to prevent negative outcomes. By fostering critical reflection, nurturing positive attitudes and respect for the human rights of all, CSE has a vast potential to contribute



to the improvement of individual lives and sustainable development. Evidence consistently shows that high-quality sexuality education delivers positive health outcomes, with lifelong impacts. Sexual education also

helps teens prepare for sexual acts and manage physical and emotional changes as they grow up, including during puberty and adolescence, while teaching them about respect, consent and where to go if they need help. This in turn reduces risks from violence, exploitation and abuse.

Evidence shows that high-quality, well implemented CSE can delay sexual initiation and reduce sexual risk taking, while increasing contraceptive use, it also shows that CSE does not increase sexual activity or encourage earlier sexual behavior.

Programmes that address both delaying sex and contraceptive use are more effective than abstinence-only programmes. While a small but growing number of countries are improving the content and

delivery of CSE in and outside the school setting, access to CSE remains uneven and quality varies, leaving many young people without essential knowledge and skills. Intended to support school-based



curricula, the UN's global guidance indicates starting CSE at the age of 5 when formal education typically begins. However, sexuality education is a lifelong process, and it could begin earlier in life, at home, with trusted caregivers. Learning is incremental; what is taught at the earliest ages provides a foundation to be built on as a child grows older and transitions to puberty and adolescence. Early childhood content focuses on understanding bodies, emotions, family structures, relationships, respect, and basic principles of consent and safety – not sexual activity.

4.3. Child Safeguarding and Protection Mechanisms

Child safeguarding is the proactive framework of policies, procedures, and actions implemented by organizations to prevent harm, abuse, and exploitation of children by their staff, volunteers, or operations. It focuses on risk reduction, promoting welfare, and ensuring safe environments in direct and indirect interactions. UNICEF defines a child protection system as the set of laws, policies, regulations and services needed across all social sectors especially social welfare, education, health, security and justice to support prevention and response to protection-related risks. Child safeguarding refers to the active measures that can be taken in order to limit the direct and indirect collateral risks which could affect children. The associated risks can include physical violence, sexual violence, exploitation and abuse, economic exploitation, and neglect of physical, emotional and psychological needs. The Convention on the Rights of the Child has the most specific provisions on the protection of children against violence, with Article 19 going as far as to require states to take appropriate legislative, administrative, social and educational measures to protect children from all forms of violence.

5. Historical and Global Context

5.1. International Milestones in Child Protection



International standards and the laws for child protection have advanced dramatically over the past century. These improvements include treaties, UN actions, changing such laws etc. We can start at the very beginning of this topic by saying that the hugest step taken by the world was to declare Child Rights (1959). This was one of the first international frameworks specifically recognizing children's rights and their

protection. Key contributions of it were; establishing 10 principles protecting children's welfare, recognizing special protection for children is essential, and inspired later legally binding treaties. For UNICEF, we can mention its expansion for Child Protection Programs in the 1990s and 2000s. We can count variable impacts of it such as strengthening national child protection systems, supporting legal reforms in many countries, promoting reporting and prevention programs. Two important protocols also empowered the improvement of child rights and their protection, by taking a big step towards creating a shield against sexual exploitation of children. Relevant protocols are 'Optional Protocol on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography'. It criminalized child sexual exploitation internationally, required states to strengthen laws and enforcement, and improved international cooperation. A different example can be given, by mentioning SDGs (Sustainable Development Goals) lastly. The SDGs included global targets to eliminate violence against children. The relevant target was to end abuse, exploitation, trafficking, and all forms of violence against children.

5.1.1 UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC)



The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) is an international human rights treaty which sets out the civil, political, economic, social, health and cultural rights of children. In 1989, world leaders came together and made a historic commitment to the world's children. They made a promise to every child to protect and fulfil their rights, by adopting an international

legal framework, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. Contained in this treaty is a profound idea: that children are not just objects who belong to their parents and for whom decisions are made, or adults in training. Rather, they are human beings and individuals with their own rights. The Convention says childhood is separate from adulthood, and lasts until 18 a special, protected time, in which children must be allowed to grow, learn, play, develop and flourish with dignity. It is up to our generation to demand that leaders from government, business and communities fulfil their commitments and take action for child rights now, once and for all. They must commit to making sure every child has every right.

5.1.2 Role of UNICEF in Global Child Protection



During the 1980s, UNICEF assisted the U.N. Commission on Human Rights in the drafting of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. After its introduction to the U.N. General Assembly in 1989, the Convention on the Rights of the Child became the most widely ratified human rights treaty in history, and UNICEF played a key role in ensuring its enforcement. The Convention on the Rights of the Child is the first human rights treaty that grants a role in its

implementation to a specialized United Nations agency UNICEF. Under the Convention, UNICEF is entitled to be present when the Committee reviews implementation of the Convention in a given country. UNICEF can be invited to

provide expert advice and to submit reports.



UNICEF, in their Child Protection Strategy Plan aims to effectively address the behavioural, social, cultural and economic determinants of child protection violations at scale, to support inclusive and effective child protection systems in preventing and responding to child protection violations, to effectively prevent and respond to child protection violations in humanitarian

situations.

Its goals are mainly promote mental health and well-being, eliminate all forms of violence against all women and girls, eliminate all harmful practices, such as child, early and forced marriage and female genital mutilation, end child labour, including the recruitment and use of child soldiers.

UNICEF aims to actualize these by,

- by effectively addressing the behavioural, social, cultural and economic determinants of child protection violations at scale
- by supporting inclusive and effective child protection systems in preventing and responding to child protection violations
- by effectively preventing and responding to child protection violations in humanitarian situations

To promote child, adolescent and family participation and community engagement, UNICEF will:

- support and promote community engagement forums/platforms, including the integration of community engagement within child protection systems;
- support and promote platforms for children's and adolescents' empowerment;
- invest in, and build the capacity of, young people to register, manage and refer relevant cases, and to act as facilitators and mentors to younger children;
- support setting standards and oversight mechanisms for child and family participation and community engagement;
- advocate for and support the establishment of complaints mechanisms and grievances redressal for children and their families.

6. Sex Education as a Protective Tool

6.1. Evidence-Based Approaches to Sexual Education

Comprehensive sexuality education helps young people to learn about the emotional, physical and social aspects of sexuality, providing them with the knowledge to protect and advocate for their health, well-being and dignity. It includes information about



healthy relationships and sexual and reproductive health and rights, relevant to people's age and culture. Having access to comprehensive sexuality education supports young people to make informed choices, exercise self-care and achieve bodily autonomy which are prerequisites for upholding human rights and reaching gender equality.

Comprehensive sexuality education plays a central role in the preparation of young people for a safe, productive, fulfilling life in a world where HIV and AIDS, sexually transmitted infections, unintended pregnancies, gender-based violence and gender

inequality still pose serious risks to their well-being. It is our utmost mission to reach out to every single child, who is silently waiting for someone to help him/her.

6.2. Cultural, Religious, and Political Resistance



Over the past decade, the most striking manifestation of anti-gender backlash has been the rollback of past gender equality policies, laws, and rights protections.

Comprehensive sexuality education has frequently been a focal point of opposition, with religious and ultra-conservative groups portraying it as a threat to parental control and a promoter of unacceptable sexual behaviors and attitudes. This movement includes a diverse array of participants, such as international religious and politically conservative organizations like the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) and Family Watch International (FWI), alongside conservative governmental bodies.

Anti-CSE groups such as Family Watch International, based in Arizona, have mobilized campaigns against CSE across East and Southern Africa as well as at the United Nations, while the ultra-conservative Catholic organization HazteOir/CitizenGo has established a CitizenGo Africa office in Nairobi.



A growing coalition of states and allied non-state actors is working to reshape international gender norms at the United Nations, the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe, the Council of Europe, and in other international institutions. Once dominated by the Vatican and a handful of religious autocracies, this coalition now includes conservative autocracies, backsliding democracies led by right-wing populists, and culturally

conservative democracies that are working hand-in-hand with influential conservative civil society groups. These strategies encompass a spectrum of actions, including limiting feminist civil society's participation in multilateral platforms and contesting gender-specific terminology within international accords; frequently, they call for the elimination of terms such as "gender" or "sexual and reproductive rights."

Language on abortion disappeared from CSW outcome documents starting in 2017, and references to comprehensive sexuality education were significantly altered in both CSW texts and UN General Assembly resolutions from 2018 onward.

Many EU member states still face challenges regarding the implementation of school-based sexuality education due to false assumptions about the benefits of educating young people about gender issues, relationships, and sexuality, despite the government's proclaimed commitment to support it. The spread of false beliefs is often helped by lobbying efforts and corporate pushback.

Accordingly, school-based sexuality education has turned into a highly politicized matter that is still up for discussion in many EU member states. One study found that as many as 37% of sex education teachers felt they could not teach what they truly

wanted, due to fear of backlash from parents. With eight states in the US explicitly requiring teachers to either abstain from discussing or to portray LGBTQ people negatively in health instruction and only nine states requiring sex education to include information on consent, the discussion on sexual and reproductive education has been overcome by a culture war of political and religious factors.

6.3. Gaps in Access and Quality Across Regions

Too many young people enter adulthood with inaccurate, incomplete or conflicting information about sexual and reproductive health, leaving them vulnerable to unintended pregnancy, sexually transmitted infections, violence and coercion. Although statistics suggest that sexuality education is widespread in American schools, the quality and comprehensiveness of this education vary considerably. Only five percent of American students receive truly comprehensive sexuality education. With eight states explicitly requiring teachers to either abstain from discussing or to portray LGBTQ people negatively in health instruction and only nine states requiring sex education or HIV/STI instruction to include information on consent, the discussion on sexual and reproductive education has been overcome by a culture war of political and religious factors.

While 85 percent of 155 countries surveyed have policies or laws relating to sexuality education, the existence of policy and legal frameworks do not always equate to comprehensive content or strong implementation. Access to CSE remains uneven and quality varies, leaving many young people without essential knowledge and skills, due to challenges such as social norms that discourage open discussion, misinformation and misconceptions that CSE encourages sexual activity, and teachers lacking the capacity and comfort to teach and discuss the subject. Sexuality education of any kind is not available in many regions of the world, adolescents' knowledge of sexual and reproductive health is not detailed, and myths are common. For example, many adolescents think that a young woman cannot get pregnant the first time she has sexual intercourse or if she has sex standing up.

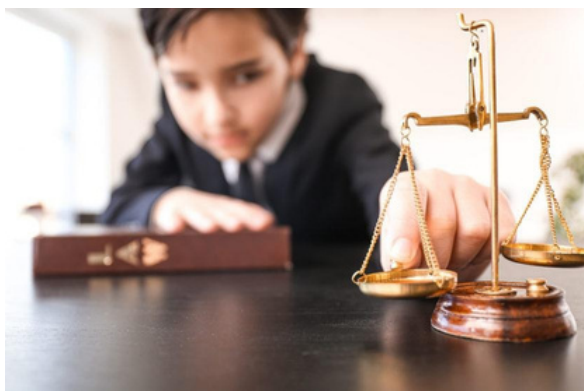
Young people from low- and middle-income countries view sexuality education as often inadequate, overly biological, heteronormative, and lacking inclusivity. They advocate for comprehensive, sex-positive sexuality education and prefer trained, nonjudgmental professionals over regular teachers due to discomfort and perceived bias. Gaps in participatory, inclusive, and empowering education approaches reinforce gender norms, exclude diverse identities, and fail to address the specific needs of adolescent girls, young women, and marginalized youth. While some countries have made significant progress in integrating CSE into formal education systems, others

have faced challenges due to factors such as inadequate training materials, poor standardization, and low teacher acceptance. This causes inequality to underscore the need for targeted interventions and support to ensure equitable access to comprehensive sexuality education for all adolescents.

The rollout of CSE interventions is highly dependent on the availability of training resources, manuals, skilled teachers, and financing. In addition, the perception of teachers, students, politicians, and the community influences the integration of interventions. In many communities worldwide, government officials, school principals, teachers and parents may not all be convinced of the need for sexuality education, or else may be reluctant to provide it because they do not want to be perceived as promoting sexual activity. Vocal groups that oppose sexuality education may be in the minority, but they can be extremely effective at pressuring policymakers and school districts to not allow sexuality education. It has long been recognized that those countries that have a more open and positive attitude toward sexuality have better sexual health outcomes. Cross-national comparisons show that, despite similar levels of sexual activity, adolescent pregnancy rates are consistently lower in many Western European countries than in other regions of the world.

7. Stakeholders, Interests, and Perspectives

7.1. Governments and National Legal Frameworks



International law obliges states to protect children from violence, abuse and neglect and uphold their rights to ensure that they are able to become empowered, successful, law-abiding citizens able to assume constructive roles in society. There are numerous challenges faced by the justice system in seeking to prevent and respond to violence against children, including lack of knowledge of

international legal standards and norms on child rights, lack of specialized legislation prohibiting violence against children in all its forms, lack of specialized child-friendly and sensitive systems and procedures, and lack of specially trained staff such as judges, prosecutors, and lawyers.

Latest actions to protect children from sexual abuse include EU's strategy, which fights against child sexual exploitation. It includes 8 initiatives to put in place a strong

legal framework for the protection of children and facilitate a coordinated approach across the many actors involved in protecting and supporting children.

The Strategy also focuses on identifying gaps in legislation as well as best practices and priority actions. It sets out the initiatives to boost coordination, including a prevention network for practitioners and researchers, creating an EU Centre on Child Sexual Abuse (EU Centre), cooperating with industry through the EU Internet Forum and supporting the WePROTECT Global Alliance to End Child Sexual Exploitation Online.

Lastly, recognizing current laws and understanding their mission is essential. Laws against child sexual abuse vary by country based on the local definition of who a child is and what constitutes child sexual abuse. Most countries in the world employ some form of age of consent, with sexual contact with an underage person being criminally penalized. As the age of consent to sexual behaviour varies from country to country, so too do definitions of child sexual abuse.

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) is an international treaty that legally obligates nations to protect children's rights. Articles 34 and 35 of the CRC require states to protect children from all forms of sexual exploitation and sexual abuse. This includes outlawing the coercion of a child to perform sexual activity, the prostitution of children, and the exploitation of children. States are also required to prevent the abduction, sale, or trafficking of children. As of January 23, 2015, 196 countries have ratified the Convention, including every member of the United Nations except the United States.

7.2. NGOs and Civil Society Organizations

Non-governmental organizations and civil society groups play a critical role in fighting child sexual violence by advocating for policy reforms, raising awareness, and providing support services for victims. Obviously, the most important part is once again education for all and every single child. Comprehensive sexuality education helps young people to learn about the emotional, physical and social aspects of sexuality, providing them with the knowledge to protect and advocate for their health, well-being and dignity. It includes information about healthy relationships and sexual and reproductive health and rights, relevant to people's age and culture. Yet too many young people enter adulthood with inaccurate, incomplete or conflicting information

about sexual and reproductive health, leaving them vulnerable to unintended pregnancy, sexually transmitted infections, violence and coercion.

By investing in young people's health and education, governments can support their engagement in society and help them achieve their full potential. Here are some examples we can show about the actions that have been taken by different NGOs (Non-Governmental Organizations) and UN branches.

SIECUS: Sex Ed for Social Change. Advancing sex ed for social change since 1964, SIECUS aims to improve sex education through advocacy, policy and coalition building. SIECUS envisions a future where comprehensive sex education is the foundation for health, pleasure, and wholeness a nation where every individual's identity is affirmed, and communities are safe and supportive. They advocate for transformative public policies, build robust cross-movement coalitions, and foster a national dialogue, ensuring sex education drives social change.

SAFE (Sexual Awareness for Everyone) Project. A successful project to reduce the risk of sexual exploitation of young people uncovered a troubling problem: many young people with learning disabilities or autism were not receiving sex education, and those who were, were getting the wrong kind. A new peer-learning programme has now been developed, hand in hand with those whose educational needs were previously not being met. SAFE – Sexual Awareness for Everyone – workshops, run by and for young people, cover sexual health, safety and many other aspects of sexuality.



Comprehensive sexuality education campaign, a foundation for life and love campaign by UNICEF. UNESCO's Foundation of Life and Love campaign aims to highlight the benefits of good quality CSE for all young people. Because CSE is not just about sex. It is about relationships, gender, puberty, consent, and sexual and reproductive health, for all young people. Despite evidence showing that

comprehensive sexuality education does not hasten sexual activity, that it has a positive impact on safer sexual behaviours and can delay sexual debut and it is a sensitive topic in many countries. Some groups portray CSE as being at odds with religious or family values, an overly generalized position that belies the complexity of what CSE really is. As part of the campaign, UNESCO interviewed families from across the world about their experience of sexuality education. From Asia to Africa, America to Europe, parents and children told us that they wish they had known more

about puberty, love, sex and relationships. UNESCO, with this wonderful campaign, invites us to listen to what they (families that participated for the campaign interview) have to say about CSE, and ask you to reflect on what CSE means to us.

8. Policy Approaches and Strategic Options

8.1. Strengthening National Child Protection Laws

Civil society organizations and government agencies are actively working around the world to address many of these problems and to better provide broad protections for children. International agreements and frameworks, such as the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Optional Protocol on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution, and Child Pornography, provide the legal basis for cooperation, but these mechanisms must be continually strengthened and adapted to keep pace with new challenges. More than 100 governments presented pledges on concrete measures to end violence against children, with the launch of the Child Protection Systems Framework of Action. UNICEF presented its own pledge to support governments and partners to reach 30 million children at risk or experiencing violence with specialized social welfare or justice services.



Another one that is worth mentioning is ICMEC ‘International Centre for Missing & Exploited Children’. With ‘The Protection Project’, they aim to strengthen legal frameworks for safeguarding children around the world. Through the Child Protection Project, ICMEC seeks to establish a common definition of what “child protection” means, taking into account the perspectives and experience of numerous nations. At the same time, they work to promote the study and practice of child protection law. The term “child protection” is very broad and can encompass a wide range of issues. Custody and support, child abuse and neglect, violence against children including sexual assault, and child prostitution, are just some of the issues that arise when discussing child protection. After conducting extensive research into the global legal situation as it affected children, they developed a Child Protection Model Law and published their findings in Arabic, English, Farsi, Russian, and Spanish. The model law consists of articles based on international legal standards and best practices from more than 68 countries and 130 national laws. Topics range from sexual and economic exploitation to protecting

children in the justice system. Along with their partners at The Protection Project, they also have compiled 100 Best Practices in Child Protection, a guide that offers examples of successful initiatives undertaken by civil society organizations, individuals, and government agencies around the world that are concerned with protecting children.

8.2. Expanding and Standardizing Sex Education Programs

Expanding comprehensive sexuality education programs can play a significant role in preventing sexual violence by equipping children with knowledge about consent, bodily autonomy, and personal safety. Sexuality education and information provides age-appropriate information about sexuality, guidance for young people on self-esteem and physical and emotional wellbeing as they grow up and start to form healthy, happy and fulfilling relationships. Sexuality education and information empowers children and young people to form positive attitudes about identity, relationships and intimacy.



CSE (Comprehensive Sexual Education) equips them with skills to communicate and make their own decisions on sexuality and their health. It helps them understand and enjoy their sexuality, take responsibility and respect their own sexual and reproductive health and rights and those of others. Children and young people are supported and protected in their development, helping them

to be critical towards misleading information - much of it online - and contradicting messages on sexuality and relationships.

Sexuality education differs across countries and contexts. While it is generally well-supported globally, delivery can be poor and patchy. In most countries, sexuality education is delivered at school as part of broader subjects. It can be viewed narrowly or strongly focussed on sexual health, biology, anatomy, reproduction, birth control and disease prevention. Gender norms, sexual diversity, sexual coercion and sexual pleasure are covered much less. In more restrictive environments, some delicate topics are excluded, ignored or underemphasised. In some countries, national policies on sexuality education have become more conservative in recent years with strong opposition from religious groups, political parties and parent groups.

Sexuality education and information stimulates the communications skills young people need to talk about personal choices, needs and boundaries within relationships. Also, it enables them to make healthy, well-informed personal choices in a challenging real and virtual world with many varying norms, values and ideas about sexuality and relationships

Ideas on the age at which sexuality education should start also vary. Most countries start between 12 or 14 years old or older. But in some Western European countries, including the Netherlands, age-appropriate sexuality education starts at ages 4 to 5. Children and adolescents have the right to be educated about themselves and the world around them in an age- and developmentally appropriate manner – and they need this learning for their health and well-being. Intended to support school-based curricula, the UN's global guidance indicates starting sexuality education and information at the age of 5 when formal education typically begins. However, sexuality education is a lifelong process, sometimes beginning earlier, at home, with trusted caregivers. Learning is incremental; what is taught at the earliest ages is very different from what is taught during puberty and adolescence.

With younger learners, teaching about sexuality does not mean teaching about sex. For instance, for younger age groups, it may help children learn about their bodies and to recognise their feelings and emotions, while discussing family life and different types of relationships, decision-making, the basic principles of consent and what to do if violence, bullying or abuse occur. This type of learning establishes the foundation for healthy relationships throughout life. There is extensive scientific evidence that shows that sexuality education and information has positive effects on the healthy and safe development of children and young people.

UNESCO published an international technical guidance on sexuality education, also an evidence-informed approach. This publication provides sound technical advice on the characteristics of effective comprehensive sexuality education (CSE) programmes, a recommended set of topics and learning objectives that should be covered in comprehensive sexuality education. This Guidance reaffirms the position of sexuality education within a framework of human rights and gender equality, and promotes structured learning about sex and relationships in a manner that is positive, affirming, and centred on the best interests of the young person. It is based on a review of the latest evidence and lessons learned from implementing CSE programmes across the globe. It reflects the contribution of sexuality education to the realization of multiple Sustainable Development Goals, notably Goal 3 on good health and well-being for all, Goal 4 on quality education for all, and Goal 5 to achieve gender equality.

The United Nations' technical guidance developed together by UNESCO, UNFPA, UNICEF, UN Women, UNAIDS (The Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS) and WHO recommends that CSE programmes should be based on an established curriculum, scientifically accurate, tailored for different ages, and comprehensive, meaning they cover a range of topics on sexuality and sexual and reproductive health throughout childhood and adolescence. Comprehensive sexuality education is most effective when taught over several years, integrating age-appropriate information and relaying scientifically accurate information about anatomy, contraception, childbirth, sexually transmitted infections, and the prevention of gender-based violence.

8.3. Preventing Sexual Violence Through Comprehensive Sex Education



In the United States, one in three youth will experience a form of abuse (physical, sexual, emotional, etc.) from a partner before the age of eighteen. Increasingly, violence prevention education is being incorporated into a comprehensive sex education curriculum. The main goal of this is to give youth the

tools and information they need to make informed and responsible decisions pertaining to sexual, romantic, and social relationships. In learning about healthy relationships, young people learn about positive expressions of intimacy, boundaries, and strategies for avoiding and/or ending unhealthy relationships. Primary themes in comprehensive sex education can include healthy relationships, gender equality, the detrimental impacts of bullying, identity development, and body confidence. Sex education reduces the risk of gender-based violence and bullying through teaching about the impacts these things can have on them or their peers. The programs are designed to build on and draw on skills learned previously. Beginning education about healthy relationships, consent, and personal boundaries with younger children allows educators to develop behavioral standards in order to proactively lower the rates of interpersonal violence.

In addition to violence prevention, age-appropriate comprehensive sex education is a powerful vehicle for addressing reproductive justice, gender equity, LGBTQ+ equality, and power and oppression. Traditional sex education programs educate young people on health concerns such as pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections. Historically, sex education and violence prevention programs have been

independent of one another. Now, more programs are being modified to include primary prevention, which proactively addresses the root causes of violence.

Relevant researches have concluded that the majority of risk factors for violence perpetration can be altered through education that is approached from a lens of prevention. However governments are still funding abstinence only programs, which provide shaming, inaccurate lessons to young people. This type of curriculum enforces gender stereotypes and heteronormative concepts. Additionally, current primary prevention strategies fail to address the majority of risk factors for sexual violence prevention.

In 2012, in an effort to standardize sexual education across the country -The National Sexuality Education Standards (NSES) - was developed. According to the NSES, comprehensive sex education teaches students to express and respect boundaries, identify trusted adults they can communicate with if they are experiencing violence, understand characteristics of healthy and unhealthy relationships, understand how media influences perceptions of what is healthy, and advocate for and create safe environments. There are eight standards included:

- Core Concepts - understanding healthy lifestyle and disease prevention
- Analyzing Influences - understanding influences of family, peers, culture, media, technology, etc. on health, sexual, and relationship decisions
- Accessing Information - know where to access accurate information, products, and services pertaining to health and sexuality
- Interpersonal Communication - demonstrate effective communication inside and outside of relationships
- Decision Making - making decisions that enhance health
- Goal Setting - ability to set goals pertaining to health
- Self-Management - ability to practice healthy behaviors and independently recognize unhealthy ones
- Advocacy - advocate for personal, family, and community health

The NSES program does have some limitations on violence prevention. For example, any sex education program within a school cannot address any form of abuse happening inside a child's home, but it is incredibly important to center and incorporate NSES into sex education programs as this can be a successful primary prevention strategy.

8.4. Enhancing International Cooperation and Data Sharing



Children experience insidious forms of violence and exploitation in every part of the world. Torn from their families and homes due to conflict, disaster and trafficking. Countless children around the world suffer from physical, emotional and sexual violence, exploitation and neglect. In all projects UNESCO supports as well as in our domestic work we are committed to ensuring that children grow up in a safe environment and that their rights are being respected. Forced into fields, mines and streets to labour under dangerous conditions.

UNICEF works day in, day out, to keep children safe from abuse and provide care to those who have suffered. Let's give another example for this before we move on with our next topic. Kindermissionswerk, also known as the Pontifical Missionary Childhood Association in Germany, is a humanitarian organization dedicated to improving the lives of vulnerable children worldwide. Kindermissionswerk works in partnership with local communities and international institutions to provide assistance to children affected by poverty, exploitation, and violence, while also promoting children's rights and global solidarity. The commitment to respect the dignity of each child is at the heart of their mission. This responsibility is reflected in the corresponding clauses of our project contracts and funding guidelines.

For the data sharing part, this carries a huge role for identifying and improving sex education for children, since the relevant data show us a baseline of which ways are beneficial and which are not. This database helps victim identification specialists worldwide analyse and compare child sexual abuse images.

International Child Sexual Exploitation

(ICSE) image and video database is an intelligence and investigative tool, which allows specialized investigators to share data on cases of child sexual abuse. Using image and video comparison software, investigators are instantly able to make connections between victims, abusers and places. The database avoids duplication of effort and saves precious time by letting investigators know whether a series of images has already been discovered or identified in another country, or whether it has similar features to other images. It also allows specialized investigators from more than 70 countries to exchange information and share data with their colleagues across the world. By analysing the digital, visual and audio content of photographs and videos, victim identification experts can retrieve clues, identify any overlap in cases and combine their efforts to locate victims of child sexual abuse. INTERPOL's Child



Sexual Exploitation database holds 4.9 million images and videos and has helped identify 42,300 victims worldwide.

8.5.Supporting Survivors andRehabilitation Frameworks

Victim-survivors of child sexual abuse can be affected in a wide range of ways, but the nature and extent of the impacts experienced vary: no two people are affected in exactly the same way. This means that victim-survivors themselves are the best experts on how they have been and are being affected, and any attempt to understand the impact on an individual should begin with them. Sexual abuse can affect children’s psychosexual and psychosocial development and attachment, with impacts on sexual functioning as well as relationships in both adolescence and adulthood.

Impact may also be affected by the victim-survivor’s sex, culture, ethnicity, disability status, and gender identity. It is therefore important to centre an understanding of intersectionality when thinking about the impacts of child sexual abuse. There can be impacts beyond the child, especially on non-abusing parents, as well as on wider society. Consequently, professionals can play a key role in mitigating the impact of child sexual abuse for both children and adults.

Many people live with the impacts of being sexually abused in childhood. The CSA Centre’s analysis of a number of surveys suggests that at least 15% of girls and 5% of boys are sexually abused before the age of 16.

We can’t pass this topic without saying that parents also face a huge responsibility, since their child has been through an awful experience. Especially mothers may experience impacts that mirror those of their sexually abused child, and this means that they also need support. Less is known about the impacts on other non-abusing family members including siblings, or on fathers, friends and peers.



There is a social impact, including victim-survivors’ increased use of and involvement with public services such as social services and the criminal justice and healthcare systems. The financial and non-financial costs relating to children who experienced contact sexual abuse in the year ending 31 March 2019 have been estimated to be at least £10.1 billion. Education has also been highlighted as a protective factor.

Modern child protection systems increasingly use trauma-informed care, meaning services are designed to recognize the psychological impact of abuse. Trauma informed care (TIC) is a whole system organisational change process which emerged from the seminal Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) study, establishing a strong graded relationship between the number of childhood adversities experienced and a range of negative outcomes across multiple domains over the life course. Training was the TIC implementation component most frequently evaluated with all studies reporting positive impact on staff knowledge, skills and/or confidence. The development of trauma-informed screening processes, and evidence-based treatments/trauma focused services, where evaluated, all produced positive results. Whilst weaknesses in study design often limited generalisability, there was preliminary evidence for the efficacy of trauma-informed approaches in improving the mental and emotional well-being of children served by community-based child welfare services, as well as their potential for reducing caregiver stress and improving placement stability.



International organizations such as UNICEF have supported programs aimed at strengthening survivor-centered recovery mechanisms and improving access to child-friendly protection services. In many countries, integrated child protection centers have been established to provide medical care, legal assistance, psychological counseling, and reporting mechanisms in a single safe environment, thereby reducing the risk of re-traumatization during investigations. Additionally, legal reforms inspired by international frameworks such as the Convention on the Rights of the Child have introduced child-friendly judicial procedures and victim protection measures. Beyond immediate assistance, rehabilitation programs also focus on long-term reintegration through educational support, family counseling, and community-based social services. Numerous civil society organizations, including Save the Children and Plan International, have implemented initiatives aimed at supporting survivors and strengthening community protection systems.

Save the Children has played a significant role in supporting rehabilitation and protection programs for children who have experienced sexual violence and exploitation. Save the Children also collaborates with governments and local partners to strengthen child protection systems, promote trauma-informed care approaches, and improve mechanisms for reporting and responding to abuse. It also aims to direct support for survivors, the organization conducts awareness campaigns and

community-based programs designed to encourage reporting, and ensure that affected children can safely reintegrate into education and society. These efforts contribute to broader international initiatives aimed at creating safer environments and more effective rehabilitation frameworks for children affected by sexual violence.

As digital exploitation has become an increasing concern, international networks such as ECPAT International have expanded efforts to support victims of online abuse and enhance global reporting and response mechanisms. These initiatives highlight the growing recognition that effective responses to child sexual violence must include comprehensive rehabilitation frameworks that address the long-term needs of survivors.

9. Questions to Ponder

- 1) How can governments and international organizations (including NGOs if needed) better protect children from sexual violence in conflict and war zones?
- 2) How can sexuality education programs, schools and communities help children recognize and report abuse?
- 3) What policies/laws (including international laws) can ensure better protection for children who are victims of sexual assault and abuse?
- 4) How can governments standardize sexuality education programs while respecting national contexts?
- 5) What are some ways to negotiate with groups and organizations against CSE?
- 6) What measures can be taken by governments and technology companies to protect children from digital forms of abuse and prevent online sexual exploitation?
- 7) What frameworks can be supported to treat the psychological and physical consequences of past victims of sexual abuse?

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