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**Evidences**

Online sexual abuse and exploitation of children (OSAEC) is a hidden crime, unknown to many but sadly experienced increasingly by the most vulnerable of Filipino children. The global survey conducted by UNICEF found that 80% of children are in danger of being sexually abused or taken advantage of online. The 2015 National Baseline Survey on Violence Against Children conducted by government and supported by UNICEF found that one in two Filipino children has experienced online violence. The above studies notwithstanding, our information remains to be limited; available data is not analyzed; and services available are fragmented and not responsive to the specific needs of the children.

OSAEC is defined as any act of exploitative nature carried out against any child that has, at some stage of the abuse, a connection to the online environment. It comes in various forms: (1) harm from content, which includes exposure to these materials; (2) harm from contact, including livestreaming, targeting and grooming for OSAEC; and (3) harm from conduct, which includes children engaging in risky online behavior. The UNICEF researches to be presented sought to understand these forms of victimization.

First, the National Study on OSAEC in the Philippines aimed to provide a deeper understanding of the problem by looking into the characteristics of child victims, offenders, the role of the private sector, and the existing case resolution and management that responds to OSAEC. It will contribute to understanding harm from content and contact. The second study is the Philippine Kids Online Survey, which is both a quantitative and qualitative research project that investigated the behavior of children online as well as the benefits, opportunities, and risks of Internet use. Because the research focuses on behavior of children, it will contribute to the understanding of risk and harm from the conduct of children online.

For sustainability, these researches are lodged in the national response plan of the Inter-Agency Council Against Child Pornography, led by the Department of Social Welfare and Development, to address OSAEC. One of the two researches was conducted by UNICEF through the support of the Australian Government.

**The National Study on OSAEC**

Perceived Proliferation of OSAEC

➢ Community standpoint: public's increasing online connectivity, lack of family cohesiveness, lack of education, and poverty
➢ Law enforcement standpoint: increased ability to detect such incidences, materials promoting online safety, the recent news of the conviction of offenders may have also contributed to the public's awareness
➢ Free public access to the Internet increases
➢ Irresponsible use of technology and insufficient digital literacy
➢ Families (users) do not realize that once they upload something online, it will be there 'forever'
➢ Lifestyle

➤ Calamities

Offenders and Perpetrators

➤ Offenders vary in sex and age
➤ Offenders are persons usually known to the child victims and survivors, oftentimes members of their respective families (parents, uncles, aunties, siblings) or communities (neighbors, older children)
➤ Offenders are not necessarily technology-savvy, but are skilled enough to use the Internet to conduct OSAEC activities
➤ Offenders claim that no harm has been done to the children, as the children are often just filmed while at play

For Perpetrators

➤ Economic gain is what primarily drives offenders to commit OSAEC acts
➤ Do not feel remorse over their engaging children for online sexual abuse and exploitation

Families of Children-Victims

➤ Dysfunctional
➤ Poor
➤ If relatively well-off, the parents were unaware

Child/Victim

➤ Not a homogenous group, age varies, puts any child – regardless of age, gender, educational status, and family background – at risk
➤ Different from traditional trafficking
➤ Mostly happens in private homes/different homes
➤ Different motivation of young OSAEC victim from older
➤ Grooming
➤ Impact on the child during rescue: the victim feels more traumatized than when he/she was abused due to separation from family, emotional attachment to facilitator/perpetrator, and/or sense of shame. During investigation and trial, disclosure issues: trauma, trust, accuracy of account
➤ During aftercare: realization of victimization

Experience of OSAEC: Differences from Offline Trafficking

➤ OSAEC victims are generally younger than offline trafficking victims
➤ Perpetrators or facilitators of OSAEC cases can be charged only when they are caught in the act, unlike in offline trafficking, on account of the amendment of the Anti-Trafficking in Persons Act, cases can be filed against offenders even if children have not been trafficked
➤ Impact: differences influence the kind of psychological, personal, and legal interventions provided for the OSAEC victims

## Motivation

➢ In many cases, for facilitators, poverty was the primary motivation for getting into this situation
➢ For the older children, they and their parents were either promised education or money
➢ For younger children, they were usually lured into the offender's house with candies and chocolates
➢ Very few received money themselves, or if they did, it was less than what was promised

## Recruitment and Grooming

➢ Of the 22 cases presented, the parents were involved in more than half of the cases
➢ All the cases reported by the different key informants took place in private homes, either in the house of the children, their relatives, or family friends who served as facilitators of the abuse and exploitation
➢ Some adolescent-victims were lured by their friends

## Online Abuse and Exploitation

➢ Contrary to the common notion that OSAEC cases happen in Internet cafés or on PisoNet, most reported cases happen privately, in the perpetrators' houses. There were reports that some transferred from one house to another, so they could not be tracked down.
➢ Based on interviews of social workers, older children were paid as low as Php 200 to as high as Php 5000, depending on what they will be asked to do. Some acts do not involve touching, but some do.

## Rescue and Aftercare

➢ It is during aftercare that they realize that they were victims—that their parents or relatives did something wrong to them. Initially, children thought that what their parents asked them to engage in was good since it led to a more comfortable life.

## Issues in Aftercare

➢ Space in the shelter and limited services
➢ Service provider's lack of training in handling OSAEC children. Specifically, they need training in behavioral management of children, especially those who experienced trauma.
➢ Victims' families do not avail of the aftercare services offered to them. Despite efforts from the line agencies and LGUs, some families discontinue the intervention programs.

## Reintegration

➢ OSAEC is relatively new compared to other forms of child abuse and exploitation, the process of how to reintegrate OSAEC children is not yet well established. There are no standard indicators of readiness to leave a shelter and no proper assessment of readiness is available.

➢ Some child victims/survivors do not want to be reintegrated anymore with their families and just want to stay in the shelter or live independently.

Access

➢ Aside from Facebook, these platforms include Messenger and Skype. However, once a transaction progresses, the parties involved may engage in more covert communications.

Impact of OSAEC

➢ The issue of OSAEC's impact on the child is quite complex, which involves the experience of the OSAEC itself, the child's age, relationship to the perpetrator/facilitator, and the child's view of the OSAEC activities themselves.

Impact of Rescue

➢ Prior to rescue, several child victims saw nothing wrong with the OSAEC experience believing these to be normal. This normalization of OSAEC may result from inappropriate socialization within their families and communities.  The greater the grooming of perpetrators, the less they are perceived as sources of abuse.

Impact of Disclosure

➢ Even with the knowledge that their perpetrators, whom they may be attached to, did wrong, the children still worry about the consequences of their testimony (e.g., their perpetrators going to jail). This poses a challenge for social workers and psychologists to find balance between seeing justice served and serving the security needs of the child under their care.
➢ One lawyer reported that "I have cases where the survivors are six years old, seven years old and eight years old, and at that age they are not able even to process what happened to them, much less verbalize it in court".
➢ There is also a question as to whether requiring court testimonies would be in the best interest of young children.
➢ The system is still heavily reliant on victim testimony and think that it is a challenge because it is not all the time to the best interest of the child to go to court, which is a traumatizing event for anyone, more so for a child, to go to court in front of strangers and try to recount the abuse and exploitation.

Issues to Consider

➢ Children's sense of control
➢ Children's sense of safety
➢ Addressing the emotional attachment to perpetrator
➢ Addressing the sense of shame

Key Findings

- OSAEC is a complex phenomenon.
- The rescue, investigation, and trial process also affect child victims.
- Children are enticed by facilitators and perpetrators.
- Free public Wi-Fi, widespread cellphone use, irresponsible use of technology, and insufficient computer literacy of children and parents pose threats.
- Cultural beliefs contribute to spread of OSAEC.
- Physical and mental health and educational services are essential.
- Faith-based organizations fill gaps.
- R.A. 10929 (Free Internet Access in Public Places Act)

**The Philippine Kids Online Survey**

Access

- 90% of Filipino children can access the Internet whenever they want or need to, and 59% connect to the Internet without supervision
- 71% use smartphones and mobile phones, and 34% use desktop computers
- 53% rely on paid Internet café services or PisoNet shops, while 44% rely on free Wi-Fi in schools, coffee shops, and malls
- Average of 116 minutes, or almost two hours, per day online
- More than half of the children surveyed report accessing the Internet without supervision
- Filipinos spend around five hours a day online

Online Activities

- Facebook (85%, 80% boys, and 90% girls) is their most favorite social media followed by YouTube (51%)
- 52% of children report using the Internet for schoolwork daily, while 51% of children visit social networking sites daily, almost at par with homework
- 47% use the Internet to watch online shows
- 30% post photos or comments online
- Four in 10 children play online games by themselves, and nearly three in 10 children play multi-player online games
- Children like listening to music online
- More girls than boys join fan sites of their favorite celebrities. Girls also post photos and comments on Facebook more often than boys.
- Boys are almost twice as likely as girls to create websites and blogs. This skill is found more for children in urban areas in middle socio-economic status households.
- Interpersonal communication has also carried over online, where new kinds of interactions are formed.
- On the Internet, children socialize with friends and build communities

➢ Nearly half of children surveyed report communicating with their siblings and parents online. They also use the Internet to connect with their friends for schoolwork, play games, and socialize.

Digital Skills

➢ Design or create websites (12% for boys and 7% for girls) found to be indicative for children located in urban areas (13%)
➢ 45% making presentations (51.5% boys, 40% girls, and it gets higher as children get older), higher in urban setting (51%) and 13.6% for medium socio-economic status
➢ 53% making pictures (58% girls, 47% boys) slightly higher in urban setting (56%) as compared to rural setting (50%)

Other Skills Culled from the Focus Group Discussions

➢ Change privacy settings of their FB accounts, block, and unfriend people
➢ Make videos and upload them on the Internet
➢ Do online hackings

Risks

➢ Two out of 10 kids are communicating with people whom they met only online
➢ Two out of 10 children report having been treated in a hurtful way; half of such cases were done online
➢ Two in 10 children are vulnerable victims to OSAEC and young male children are as vulnerable as female children and 71% of these cases use mobile phones, smartphones, or tablets
➢ One out of 10 younger children is engaged in risky offline activities
➢ Girls experienced more exclusion than boys, while more boys report being treated badly online
➢ More boys than girls reported being threatened on the Internet and have had "other nasty or hurtful things" happened to them
➢ A larger percentage of girls than boys report being left out or excluded from online activities
➢ Interestingly, except for questions on harmful or hurtful messages sent to them and exclusion, the population with highest report of being treated in a hurtful or nasty way online were children between nine to 11 years of age
➢ Some children have personally met people they first met online
➢ Internet use could hurt children through cyberbullying
➢ Bullying is also present in cyberspace

Risks to Harm

➢ Some children confess they bullied others
➢ Six in 10 children believe other children are treated better than them
➢ Seven in 10 children are discriminated offline

Upsetting Circumstances for Children

➢ Slow Internet speed, viruses, and losing money online
➢ More boys than girls report having lost money by being cheated on the Internet, and having spent too much money on online games or in-application purchases
➢ More boys than girls also report having someone finding out their location because their phone or Internet device was tracked

Parental Mediation and Support

➢ Majority of parents do not use the Internet; only one-sixth of them use it. Their digital skills are similar to children ages 12 to 14 years.
➢ They (32%) advise kids to properly use the Internet, and they initiate parent-child talk
➢ Majority of parents (43%) do not help their children when faced with online harm
➢ Female and younger kids are more restricted by parents when it comes to Internet use
➢ About a third of parents exercise technical mediation

Headline Results

➢ Nearly half of children (48%) said that the Internet is not safe for them.
➢ About two in 10 children are vulnerable victims of online sexual abuse and exploitation, and that boys are as vulnerable as girls.
➢ About two in 10 children report to having been treated in a hurtful way; 11% of such cases were done online.
➢ Out of the 18% children with unwanted sexual experience online, 17% said that family members are involved (parents and young siblings).
➢ Nine to 11 year olds are top users of Skype. 9% of those belonging to the nine to 11 year olds had been in trouble with the police; 9% had experienced sexual relationship.
➢ About one in 10 children is vulnerable, and boys are as vulnerable as girls.
➢ In seven out of 10 cases, mobile phones, smartphones, or tablets were used.
➢ The survey asked what children have done online that they did not want to or did not have any idea about.
➢ Out of the children who reported being asked for sexual information, a low proportion reported that they had shared such information also.
➢ The conversion figure, i.e., from solicitation to actual sending of personal and sexual information, is higher among boys than girls, highlighting increased risks among boys. More disturbing: the youngest age group, children who are nine to 11 years old, have a very high conversion figure.
➢ Some children share during focus group discussions that they were exposed to unwanted online sexual images and videos.
➢ Such unwanted online sexual content could trigger their curiosity; for those with low resilience and weak parental mediation, exposure to such could lead to OSAEC.
➢ Among children with unwanted sexual experience, some say family members are involved.
➢ Many children prefer not to say anything about the online harm.
➢ When children are bothered or upset, they talk to family members, friends, and classmates.

- ➤ About a third would talk to their siblings. Around the same number also mention talking to their peers of the same age group, while others would to classmates when they feel bothered or upset about something.
- ➤ Children also reveal they approach members of their extended family, such as cousins, grandparents, aunts, and uncles.
- ➤ Only a few would talk to their teachers, boyfriend or girlfriend, or prefer not to talk to anyone at all.
- ➤ Generally, children acknowledge the positive effect of Internet use but also four of 10 children do not view the Internet as an aspirational platform for a better life.