

# PROTECTING CHILDREN IN NAMIBIA FROM ONLINE SEXUAL EXPLOITATION AND ABUSE: THE WAY FORWARD

Children in Namibia are facing significant risks as they navigate the complexities of the digital world. *Disrupting Harm* has estimated that in the past year alone 9 percent of internet-using children aged 12 to 17-years have experienced clear examples of online sexual exploitation and abuse (OCSEA) that includes blackmailing them to engage in sexual activities, sharing their sexual images without permission, or coercing them to engage in sexual activities through promises of money or gifts. This represents an estimated 20,000 children across the country. Low public awareness about OCSEA combined with a range of social barriers contribute to low rates of disclosure of OCSEA by children. Frontline support workers, law enforcement and justice workers need training, systemic changes, and resources to sustain the prevention and responses to these crimes. Legislation related to OCSEA requires enhancement; encouragingly promising draft laws are undergoing consultations. Urgent action from the government, industry and the social service sector is needed to disrupt harm to children in Namibia.

## Recommended action

*Disrupting Harm* in Namibia makes a series of detailed, evidence-based recommendations drawn from the key research insights. Broadly speaking, the recommendations call on the Government of Namibia to **Act** to ensure legislative reform and to strengthen systemic capacity to address OCSEA, **Educate** public officials, frontline workers, caregivers and children about OCSEA; and **Invest** in the implementation of new and existing initiatives to address OCSEA.

### Act

- Strengthen the national legal framework to support the prosecution of all manifestations of OCSEA. Enact the Cybercrime Bill and the Combating Sexual Exploitation Bill.
- Expand access to legal representation to include all children impacted by OCSEA.
- Create a dedicated specialised law enforcement unit to investigate OCSEA cases.
- Enhance data collection and monitoring of OCSEA cases within the law enforcement.
- Develop and implement child friendly interview guidelines for use by the law enforcement and justice professionals.

- Establish and maintain a national police connection to INTERPOL's ICSE database.
- Improve cooperation between internet service providers and law enforcement agencies. Enhance collaboration with relevant stakeholders to develop innovative technological solutions to tackle OCSEA.
- Monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of helplines. Provide resources and training on OCSEA to helpline staff so that they provide good quality information and advice to children who were subjected to OCSEA, but also their peers, siblings and caregivers.
- Initiate community-based mechanisms that facilitate help-seeking and reporting of OCSEA.
- Enhance the quality and availability of psychosocial support services for survivors of OCSEA.
- Accede to the Convention on Cyber Security and Personal Data Protection adopted by the African Union in 2014.
- Provide law enforcement officers, prosecutors, and court personnel with a standard information package that may inform victims of OCSEA and their caregivers about all relevant procedures and their rights, for example their rights to compensation.

### • Educate

- Raise public awareness of child sexual exploitation and abuse, including explaining the roles that digital technology may play in creating risks of OCSEA.
- Teach caregivers about digital platforms/technologies and online safety techniques. Support caregivers to develop the skills to engage with children around sex and sexuality, consent, and boundaries with a view to encouraging dialogue about recognising and responding to sexual abuse and exploitation both online and offline.
- Teach children about internet safety and how to recognise and report OCSEA. Educate children about the risks of sharing sexual content.
- Educate all law enforcement personnel, justice professionals and social service frontline workers regarding OCSEA and appropriate handling of OSCEA cases with a focus on child-friendly approaches.
- Build the capacity and collaborations of law enforcement to respond to OCSEA involving both local and international offenders.

### • Invest

- Allocate funding earmarked to address OCSEA to all relevant government agencies to enact the recommendations contained within *Disrupting Harm* in Namibia.
- Allocate funding to appropriately resource the National Child Online Safety Taskforce.
- Invest in the requisite tools, equipment, and capacity building to enable law enforcement to undertake OCSEA-related investigations.
- Dedicate resources to the child helpline and CSAM hotline to improve record keeping so that they can encode detailed statistics on the OCSEA reported. Increasing the capacity of these organisations to collect and analyse such data will provide a better understanding of children's experiences of OCSEA.

## Key insights

*Disrupting Harm in Namibia* outlines six key research insights:

1. In the past year alone, 9% of internet-users aged 12-17 in Namibia were subjected to clear examples of online sexual exploitation and abuse that included blackmailing children to engage in sexual activities, sharing their sexual images without permission, or coercing them to engage in sexual activities through promises of money or gifts. Scaled to the national population, this represents an estimated 20,000 children who were subjected to any of these harms in the span of just one year.
2. Most offenders of OCSEA (about 80%) are someone the child already knows. These crimes can happen while children spend time online, or in person but involving technology.
3. Most children experienced OCSEA through social media with Facebook, WhatsApp, and Instagram being the most common platforms where this occurred.
4. The majority of children were more inclined to disclose being victims of OCSEA to their interpersonal networks rather than through formal reporting mechanisms like helplines or the police. A notable proportion of children (30%) did not tell anyone about their OCSEA experiences.
5. The law enforcement, justice and social support systems have insufficient awareness, capacity, and resources to respond to cases of OCSEA appropriately and in a child friendly manner.
6. Important OCSEA-related legislation, policies and standards are not yet enacted in Namibia hindering the criminal justice system to address OCSEA and victims to access justice.

The full report and complete list of recommendations can be found [here](#).



## About Disrupting Harm

*Disrupting Harm in Namibia* is part of an unprecedented large-scale multi-country research project into OCSEA that draws on the research expertise of ECPAT, INTERPOL, UNICEF Office of Research - Innocenti, and their networks of both national and global partners. It is supported by the [Fund to End Violence Against Children](#), through its Safe Online initiative and focuses on 13 countries in Eastern and Southern Africa and Southeast Asia.

Data collection took place from early 2020 through to early 2021 with the cooperation of the Government of Namibia and a wide range of public bodies and other organizations active in the country.

A comprehensive analysis was made of the legislation, policy and systems addressing OCSEA in Namibia. A range of statistical data was gathered for 2017-2019. Surveys were conducted with internet-using children, their caregivers and front-line service providers from the private and voluntary sectors. Interviews were held with high-level government officials, law enforcement officials, justice professionals, and child victims of OCSEA and their caregivers. All the information was then analysed and triangulated. The analysis for *Disrupting Harm in Namibia* was finalized in July 2021. The recommendations were discussed further at a national consultation in February 2022.

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