Disrupting Harm

Evidence from 13 countries on the context, threats, and children's perspectives of online child sexual exploitation and abuse.

Detailed Analysis of the Frontline Service Providers Survey

Thailand

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This report is a summary of preliminary data collected for this research project. The perspectives contained herein represent the individuals interviewed and surveyed. Support from the Fund to End Violence Against Children does not constitute endorsement.

Introduction

The Disrupting Harm frontline workers survey aimed to explore the knowledge, attitudes and practices related to OCSEA that are presenting to those directly working to prevent and respond on the welfare frontline. Insights from frontline workers via this survey allowed us to more deeply explore findings from other research activities such as the national literature reviews and government interviews from the perspective of staff directly engaged in the response to this growing problem.

A convenience sample of 50 interviews were conducted with client-facing frontline child protection workers who were surveyed in each participating country. In order to participate in the survey respondents had to meet the following qualifying requirements:

1) Be an adult over 18 years of age;
2) Work the last 12 months (at least) in the field of social work, psychology or welfare;
3) Manage their own case load directly in the last 12 months;
4) Have caseloads that included children over the last 12 months.

The survey itself included a combination of 68 closed and open-ended questions. The data was collected via SurveyGizmo and administered by Disrupting Harm staff (either in person, or remotely via phone/Skype – due to COVID-19). Whilst the data collected is not statistically representative, it is still a vital snapshot in indicating scope, and broadening our perspectives on knowledge, attitudes and practices related to OCSEA.

NOTE:
In Thailand, the data collection for the survey was conducted during the early stages of the COVID-19 pandemic from February 25th 2020 to June 16th 2020 where movement restrictions were in place.

Basic Description of Survey Sample

The frontline participants surveyed in Thailand (n=50) consisted of 37 females, 11 males and 2 people identifying themselves as "other".

Participants were asked to select a single category that best describes their organisation. The majority of participants identified their organisation as non-governmental (n=36 - 72%), followed by government-run organisation (n=13 - 26%). One person (2%) selected the "other" option (Figure 1). As indicated by the survey facilitator, some respondents belonged to faith-based organisations, but preferred to identify themselves as NGOs.

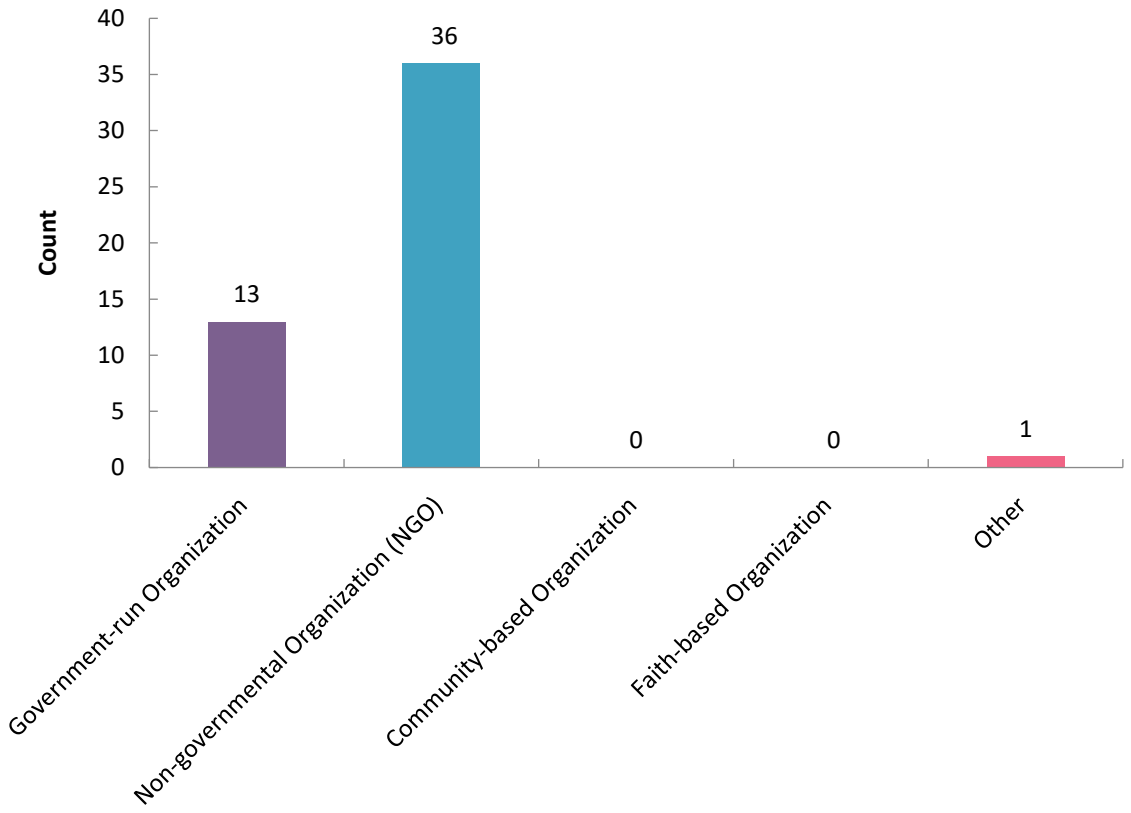
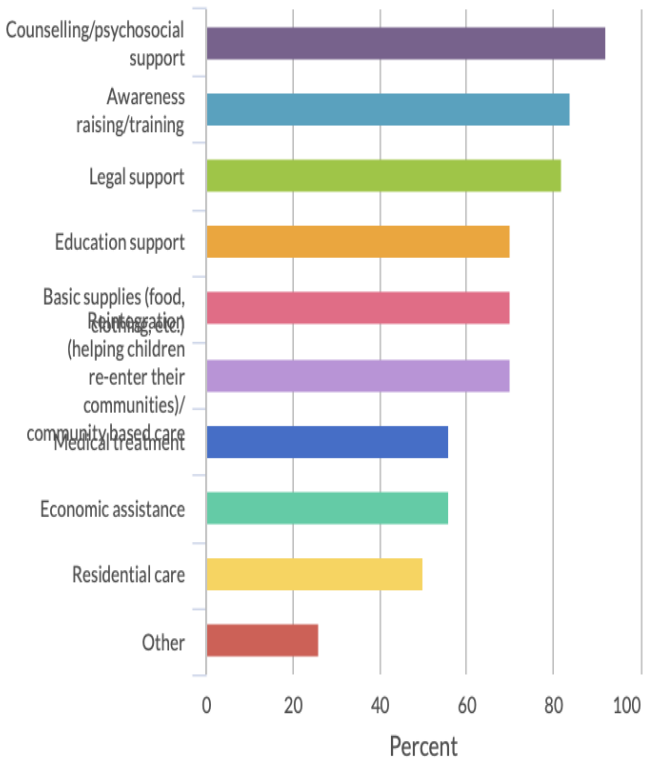


Figure 1. Types of participants' organisations.

The frontline social support workers were asked to detail what type of services they provided related to children. The results are illustrated in Figure 2 below.



Value	Percent	Responses
Counselling/psychosocial support	92.0%	46
Awareness raising/training	84.0%	42
Legal support	82.0%	41
Education support	70.0%	35
Basic supplies (food, clothing, etc.)	70.0%	35
Reintegration (helping children re-enter their communities)/ community based care	70.0%	35
Medical treatment	56.0%	28
Economic assistance	56.0%	28
Residential care	50.0%	25
Other	26.0%	13

Figure 2. Types of services provided by participants' organisations.

94% of participants worked in organisations providing more than one service to children (n=47). As Figure 2 indicates, the most frequently reported services were counselling/psychosocial support (n=46 – 92%) and awareness raising/training (n=42 – 84%). That was closely followed by legal support (n=41 – 82%), education support (n=35 – 70%), providing basic supplies (food, clothing etc.) (n=35 – 70%) and reintegration services (n=35 – 70%). About half of the respondents reported also providing medical treatment (n=28 – 56%), economic assistance (n=28 – 56%) and residential care (n=25 – 50%).

Other services mentioned by the frontline social support workers included:

- Case referral to partner agencies
- Leadership/capacity building trainings for children
- Employment support
- Learning enhancement
- Investigations to identify children
- Law enforcement
- Budget support for NGOs
- Psychological and spiritual support in line with Christian faith
- Removing child abuse material from the Internet
- Repatriation of victims to their community or country of origin

Additionally, two participants described the services their organisation offered in more detail:

"Victim Assistance. We can refer cases to a multidisciplinary team because law enforcement agencies are not able to handle all aspects of the needs. Support to a child has to employ a victim-centred approach" (RA3-TH-39-A);

"[This service] assists children who are victims of human trafficking and provides them with care during the trial process. When the trial is over, a multi-disciplinary team will convene a meeting to review the child's readiness to reunite with family. If the child and family are not ready for reunion, the child will be sent to a welfare home" (RA3-TH-44-A).

It should be mentioned that services provided to child victims of abuse and exploitation in Thailand are managed by multidisciplinary teams – to which a case is referred by frontline social support workers. The multidisciplinary team is composed of police, the Attorney General's office staff, social workers, psychologists, and medical doctors. Hence, services provided to the victims are very comprehensive and usually include legal aid, medical care, legal procedures, psychosocial counselling, protection and reintegration. The high percentage of reported services by respondents might therefore be influenced by the fact that they consider themselves as part of the broader multidisciplinary team – and did not focus solely on services provided by their organisations.

Perpetrator Demographics

To expand on the current understanding of the context in which OCSEA happens in Thailand, the survey sought to explore the typical relationships observed by participants between offenders and child victims. 19 out of 50 participants reported they had seen cases of OCSEA and their observations identified men more commonly as perpetrators and facilitators of OCSEA.

Out of those who had managed cases that involved OCSEA during the past 12 months, the most commonly referenced relationship between the victim and perpetrator or facilitator was said to be that the perpetrator/facilitator was a stranger (national), followed by: community member over 18, parent/step parent, other relative over 18, and foreigner. This goes against the commonly held assumption in Thailand that it is mostly foreigners committing abuse. Interestingly, no respondents selected 'family friend', 'sibling' or 'community member under 18' to describe the relationship between the victim and perpetrator/facilitator.

When frontline social support workers were given the opportunity to provide additional comments about perpetrators and facilitators that they encountered in OCSEA cases, they described that friends of similar age can also become perpetrators, e.g.: *"Aside from strangers, a large number of wrongdoers or perpetrators are those close to children but are not relatives. They include boyfriends or intimate friends who are in the same ages or are older"* (RA3-TH-18-A). Others pointed to people of authority holding government positions as well as teachers as being involved in the abuse: *"Community members who are over 18 years of age and are government officials* (*such as police officers)"* (RA3-TH-13-A)*; "Perpetrators are people related to children such as tutors, older friends, relatives, mothers and police officers. These people have befriended children as part of a grooming process"* (RA3-TH-14-A); *"A schoolteacher who was also a perpetrator and facilitator"* (RA3-TH-27-A). *One participant mentioned that*: *"Most cases search for this kind of job by themselves or by relying on peers' information"* (RA3-TH-32–A).

Below are a number of quotes from participants describing their insights into some of the child sexual exploitation and OCSEA cases they worked with:

"Most of the OCSEA cases are not transferred to a protection home but continue to live with their families while receiving support from a social team" (RA3-TH-44-A);

"These are cases of sexual abuse and children at risk of sexual abuse. One child was repeatedly abused sexually by the same perpetrator" (RA3-TH-26-A);

"The girl was filmed while being sexually abused and was threatened to go meet the perpetrator" (RA3-TH-11-A);

"The perpetrator contacted the child online to draw the child away from guardians and abused the child. [This child] is now in the assistance process and a safety plan has been drawn with the family. But the same man could still contact the child and repeat his abuse" (RA3-TH-26-A);

"There are still victims who have not been counted in the 25 cases under the care process of responsible agencies and under care of the police. In the interviews through the police page, it was found that girls and boys have made up similar proportions. They are young adults aged between 12 and 14" (RA3-TH-24-A).

Scenarios

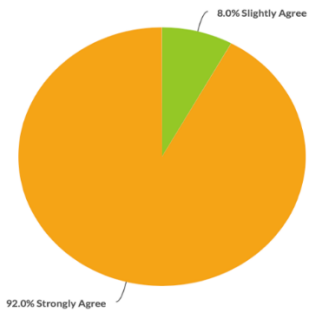
Participants were presented with four scenarios depicting situations in which at least one offender victimised a child through different modes of online sexual abuse and exploitation. After being provided with definitions of 'OCSEA', a 'perpetrator' and a 'facilitator' earlier in the survey, the participants were asked to indicate the extent to which they agreed or disagreed that the child was a victim and that the offender had committed an OCSEA-related offence.[1] These questions were designed to elicit insights about how participants assessed different forms and situations of OCSEA. It should be noted that responses are likely based on a combination of the participant's knowledge on the issue, including how these issues may (or may not) be defined in law in a country, as well as influenced by social norms and beliefs. Irrespective of the basis for responses, the results indicate areas that are well understood (sometimes almost unanimously) and others where training and consistent messaging is needed to ensure consistent responses.

A four-point Likert scale was used to assess agreement with statements for the scenario questions. Where interesting indications in differences occurred, we note them, but otherwise combined 'slightly agree' and 'strongly agree' together and 'slightly disagree and strongly disagree' resulting in binary agree/disagree categories for the analysis presented here.

[1] Names for the scenarios were changed to common names in each country for the translations but have been edited in the analysis to be consistent across all the Disrupting Harm reports.

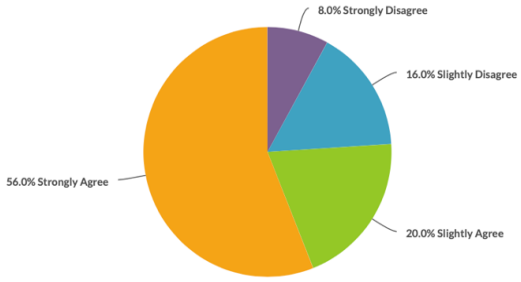
Scenario 1

Palila pays a 16-year-old younger relative, Tamah, to undress while filming and later posts it online. Mamo, who does not know Palila, watches this interaction online from home 30 miles away.



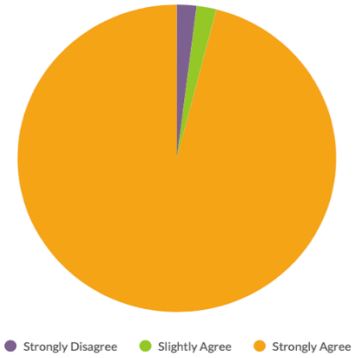
Value	Percent	Responses
Strongly Disagree	0.0%	0
Slightly Disagree	0.0%	0
Slightly Agree	8.0%	4
Strongly Agree	92.0%	46
		Totals: 50

Figure 3. Do you think Tamah is a victim of OCSEA?



Value	Percent	Responses
Strongly Disagree	8.0%	4
Slightly Disagree	16.0%	8
Slightly Agree	20.0%	10
Strongly Agree	56.0%	28
		Totals: 50

Figure 4. Do you think Mamo has committed an OCSEA-related crime?



Value	Percent	Responses
Strongly Disagree	2.0%	1
Slightly Disagree	0.0%	0
Slightly Agree	2.0%	1
Strongly Agree	96.0%	48
		Totals: 50

Figure 5. Do you think Palila has committed an OCSEA-related crime?

In scenario 1, all participants (100%) agreed Tamah was a victim of sexual exploitation (Figure 3).

Participants seemed to struggle the most to identify if Mamo had committed an OCSEA related crime. Out of 50 participants, 76% (n=38) agreed that Mamo had committed an OCSEA-related crime, however 24% (n=12) disagreed (Figure 4).

Nearly all respondents (98%) agreed that Palila has committed an OSCEA related crime. Yet Figure 5 indicates one participant disagreed (strongly).

When given the opportunity to share additional comments on the scenario, respondents talked mostly about Mamo, with the majority focusing on his intent to commit a crime:

"If Mamo downloaded the clip, he would be a perpetrator. If he only viewed it, he may not be charged because there was not intent to acquire. If images popped up by themselves, he would not be condemned" (RA3-TH-26-A);

"One has to determine the persons' intent to offend and to acquire pornographic material" (RA3-TH-13-A);

"If Mamo shared the video clips onwards, he would become a perpetrator" (RA3-TH-35-A);

"In case of Mamo, it has to be determined whether an access was a free or a paid one. If the child paid to view the content, it would be considered a crime" (RA3-TH-27-A);

"In the case of Mamo, we should consider the intent and methods utilised to access the media. If he accessed the material without intent and has not downloaded the material, he will not be wrongdoer" (RA3-TH-14-A);

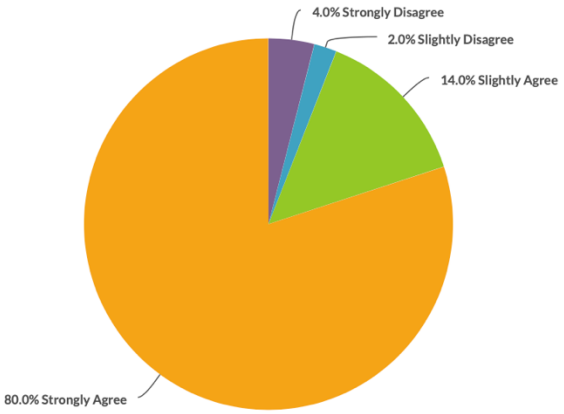
"It seems that Mamo has not yet violated the law. But, if Mamo downloaded the clip into his possession and shared it onwards, he would certainly be a wrong-doer" (RA3-TH-44-A);

"The offence of Mamo has to be yet legally confirmed because there have been no users of media (according to the messages). It has not been found whether or not and how the material had been downloaded or disseminated. However, there is certainly an offence of child abuse on Internet" (RA3-TH-24-A);

"This case is in conflict with law in several aspects such as possession of material with the intent of exploitation, according to the Computer Crime Act and the Penal Code, for example" (RA3-TH-17-A).

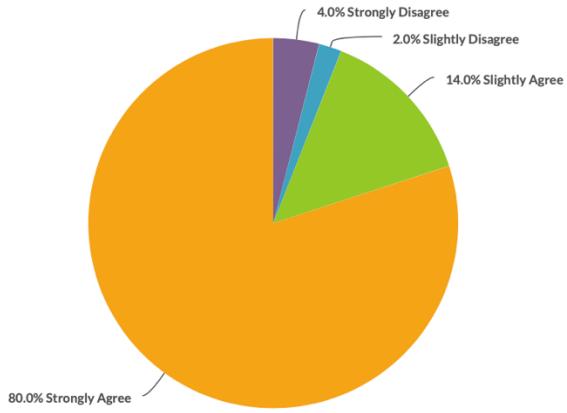
Scenario 2

Kaimi is a 17-year-old student. Kaimi has struggled to make good grades this year and is worried that Uli, a teacher who is a close family friend, will tell Kaimi's dad. Kaimi offers to send Uli naked pictures if he promises not to talk to the family. Uli accepts.



Value	Percent	Responses
Strongly Disagree	4.0%	2
Slightly Disagree	2.0%	1
Slightly Agree	14.0%	7
Strongly Agree	80.0%	40
		Totals: 50

Figure 6. Do you think Kaimi is a victim of OCSEA?



Value	Percent	Responses
Strongly Disagree	4.0%	2
Slightly Disagree	2.0%	1
Slightly Agree	14.0%	7
Strongly Agree	80.0%	40
		Totals: 50

Figure 7. Do you think Uli has committed an OCSEA-related crime?

47 participants (94%) agreed that Kaimi is a victim of OCSEA and that Uli has committed an OCSEA-related crime, and 3 disagreed - see Figure 6 and Figure 7.

When given the opportunity to share additional comments on the scenario, participants talked about the role a teacher should play but also the perception of child victims under Thai law:

"Agreed. Since children have much less maturity, they need to be assisted. But if we use the Thai law, we may not consider them as victims because they took part in the wrong-doing" (RA3-TH-14-A). Victim-blaming attitude is common among the public in Thailand - a child is often perceived to be responsible for the wrong-doing and not considered to be a victim.

"Even though Kaimi was the one who offered, but Kaimi is a minor. The teacher who should have played a guardian role instead violated the law and his own ethics by accepting the offer. At the same time, if Kaimi intended to produce the material for dissemination and sold them by herself, she would have become a wrong-doer" (RA3-TH-24-A);

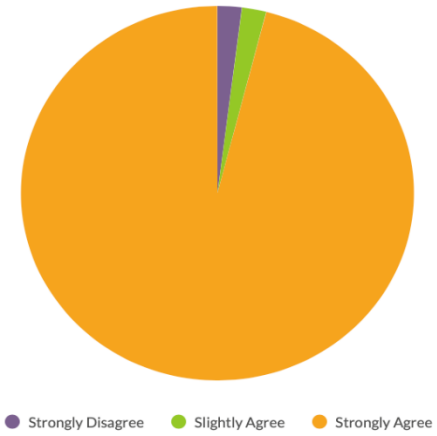
"Uli became a perpetrator the moment he accepted images sent online by the child" (RA3-TH-25-A);

"Uli is more mature. He should advise the child why such action was not correct. Teacher took the chance to exploit the child sexually" (RA3-TH-17-A);

"The child is younger than 18 years. Even if the child gave consent, the child is still considered a victim" (RA3-TH-44-A).

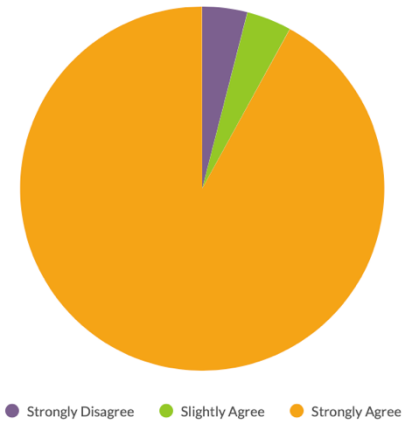
Scenario 3

Sam is a 10-year-old whose family struggles to make ends meet in their rural village. Sam's uncle, Alex, has a good government job and has always given money to help the family out. Recently, Uncle Alex wrote a message to Sam on Facebook asking to have a secret meeting at his house. When Sam arrives, Uncle Alex asked Sam to sit on his lap and began touching his private parts.



Value	Percent	Responses
Strongly Disagree	2.0%	1
Slightly Disagree	0.0%	0
Slightly Agree	2.0%	1
Strongly Agree	96.0%	48
		Totals: 50

Figure 8. Do you think Sam is a victim of OCSEA?



Value	Percent	Responses
Strongly Disagree	4.0%	2
Slightly Disagree	0.0%	0
Slightly Agree	4.0%	2
Strongly Agree	92.0%	46
		Totals: 50

Figure 9. Do you think Alex has committed an OCSEA-related crime?

As Figure 8 shows, nearly all participants (n=49 - 98%) agreed that Sam is a victim of OCSEA. One person strongly disagreed (2%). 96% agreed that Alex has committed an OCSEA-related crime (92% strongly and 4% slightly) and 4% disagreed (n=2) – Figure 9.

When given the opportunity to share additional comments on the scenario, respondents commented:

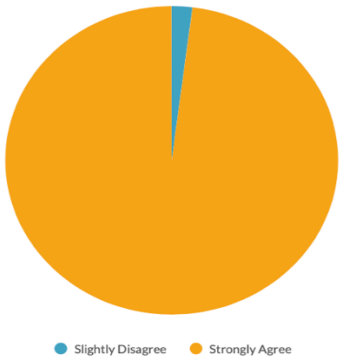
"This is considered an "online grooming" offence, which does not fall under protection of the Thai law" (RA3-TH-14-A);

"Based on the information, even though Alex has used Facebook to send messages and conduct sexual abuse towards Sam, we have not been able to ascertain whether or not there had been grooming in this case (*because the child may have felt it necessary to offer help and to return favour although unwillingly). Therefore, it is likely that Alex has committed OCSEA".* (RA3-TH-24-A);

"By age, a 10-year-old child is a minor. This case is certainly a violation of law" (RA3-TH-17-A).

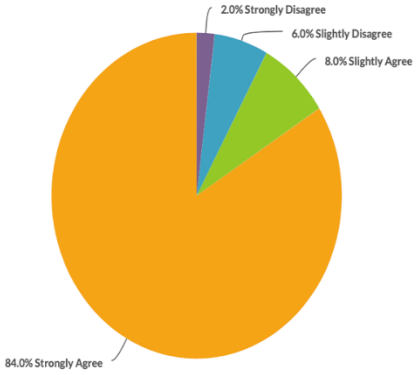
Scenario 4

Joe is 16, and his girlfriend Lucy is 15. They have been dating for a year and regularly have sex. Sometimes, when they can't be together, they send photos to each other of themselves naked. Joe's friend Matt knows about this and breaks into Joe's phone and forwards naked pictures of Lucy to a group of their friends.



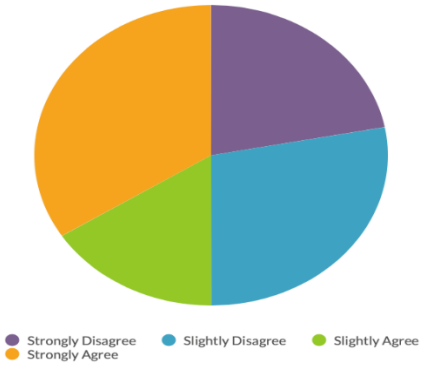
Value	Percent	Responses
Strongly Disagree	0.0%	0
Slightly Disagree	2.0%	1
Slightly Agree	0.0%	0
Strongly Agree	98.0%	49
		Totals: 50

Figure 10. Do you think Lucy is a victim of an OCSEA related crime?



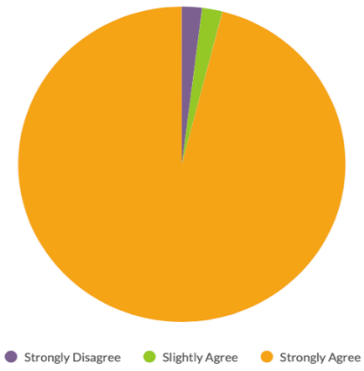
Value	Percent	Responses
Strongly Disagree	2.0%	1
Slightly Disagree	6.0%	3
Slightly Agree	8.0%	4
Strongly Agree	84.0%	42
		Totals: 50

Figure 11. Do you think Joe is a victim of an OCSEA related crime?



Value	Percent	Responses
Strongly Disagree	22.0%	11
Slightly Disagree	28.0%	14
Slightly Agree	16.0%	8
Strongly Agree	34.0%	17
		Totals: 50

Figure 12. Do you think that Joe has committed an OCSEA related crime?



Value	Percent	Responses
Strongly Disagree	2.0%	1
Slightly Disagree	0.0%	0
Slightly Agree	2.0%	1
Strongly Agree	96.0%	48
		Totals: 50

Figure 13. Do you think that Matt has committed an OCSEA related crime?

Nearly all participants (n=49 - 98%) agreed that Lucy is a victim of OCSEA and that Matt has committed an OCSEA-related crime. One respondent strongly disagreed (2%) – Figure 10 and Figure 13.

There was also strong agreement between participants that Joe is a victim of an OCSEA-related crime (92% agreed). 4 respondents (8%) disagreed – Figure 11.

Biggest divergencies were found in the question asking weather Joe has committed an OCSEA-related crime. 50% of participants agreed with the statement (34% strongly and 16% slightly), while the second half disagreed (28% slightly and 22 strongly) – Figure 12.

When given the opportunity to share additional comments on the scenario, the majority of responses focused on the intent of the perpetrator:

"Even though Joe and Lucy have downloaded pornographic material into the computer, they have not published the material widely and have had no intent to disseminate it either. There is no intent to exploit each other therefore it is a case of premature sexual relationships" (RA3-TH-14-A);

"Facts about Joe are not yet clear. We have to determine whether there was a conspiracy between Joe and Matt because accessing mobile phone data required a passcode. We have to know whether Joe has given the code to Matt… Often, [minors] cannot appreciate the consequences of what they do" (RA3-TH-17-A);

"From the viewpoint of a girl whose photographic material has been published, it is clear that she is a victim. For Lucy, intrusion into her private information is considered an offence. It is unclear whether Matt, the perpetrator, still possesses photographic material of Lucy for possible future threats to force her to make more images or for exploitation. Joe's offence has to be further investigated through her telephone messages to determine whether it was a hack or a consent of Joe to cooperate with Matt" (RA3-TH-24-A);

"In the case of point 36, we have to examine the intent of Joe. Was it for possession? Not sure" (RA3-TH-44-A);

"The difficulty in taking a decision is that Joe is still a minor and is under protection of the Child Protection Law" (RA3-TH-27-A).

Summary

Participants overwhelmingly correctly identified the children as victims and the adults as offenders across the four scenarios. However, in three questions there were some larger divergences. The first question related to the scenario (Scenario 1) in which an adult paid his 16-year-old female relative to undress while he filmed it and later posted it online. In this scenario, an unrelated individual, Mamo, who did not know the child or the other adult, watched the interaction online from home 30 miles away. Nearly all of the participants agreed that the child was a victim of sexual exploitation and that the adult who paid and filmed her had committed an OCSEA-related crime. However, out of 50 participants, 12 (24%) disagreed that Mamo had committed an OCSEA-related crime (Figure 4).

The second question related to the scenario (Scenario 4) in which a 16-year old male, Joe, and his 15-year-old girlfriend, Lucy, who have been together for a year and were having regular sex and sometimes were sending each other naked photos. In that scenario, Matt, Lucy's friend, broke into Joe's phone and forwarded naked pictures of Lucy to a group of their friends. The majority of participants agreed that Lucy and Joe were victims of OCSEA and that Matt has committed an OCSEA related crime. However, participants were equally divided in the question asking whether they perceive Joe as an offender - 50% agreed that Joe has committed an OCSEA related crime (34% strongly and 16% slightly). While technically two children consensually photographing themselves naked is a crime, there is ongoing debate about this thinking. For example, if the images had remained between the two consenting parties harm may not have been experienced. In a 2020 study on self-generated content, it was found that children thought it could even provide advantages in their relationships and/or increase their self-esteem.[2] On the other hand, when the materials are forwarded without consent, they may end-up circulating the web and being acquired by offenders.[3] Additionally, the normalisation of sexual content, both in terms of images and sexualised online conversations, may lead to victims underreporting because they may fail to perceive what is happening to them as abusive or exploitative.[4]

Lastly, in Scenario 2, where a girl offers to send naked pictures to her teacher, who accepts it, only 80% strongly agreed that she is a victim. This reflects the societal attitude on blaming the victims. There is still a common perception that in child sexual exploitation and child sexual abuse material cases, the victims let the abuse happen themselves and should not be called victims nor deserved to be assisted. This is why the concept of "grooming" should be better understood more among the workers.

[2] ECPAT Sweden. (2020, May). "I början vart det lite läskigt men nu är det vardag" En rapport om yngre barn och egenproducerat material. [Translated from Swedish].
[3] Bracket Foundation. (2019). Artificial Intelligence: Combating online sexual abuse of children. 10.
[4] Palmer, T. (2015). Digital Dangers: the impact of technology on the sexual abuse and exploitation of children. *Barnado's*. 35.

Vulnerabilities

Based on their knowledge and experience, participants indicated whether they believed a list of factors about the child and society increased children's vulnerability to sexual exploitation in their country: in general, and particularly related to OCSEA.

- **Factors about the child identified as increasing vulnerability to sexual abuse and exploitation in general**

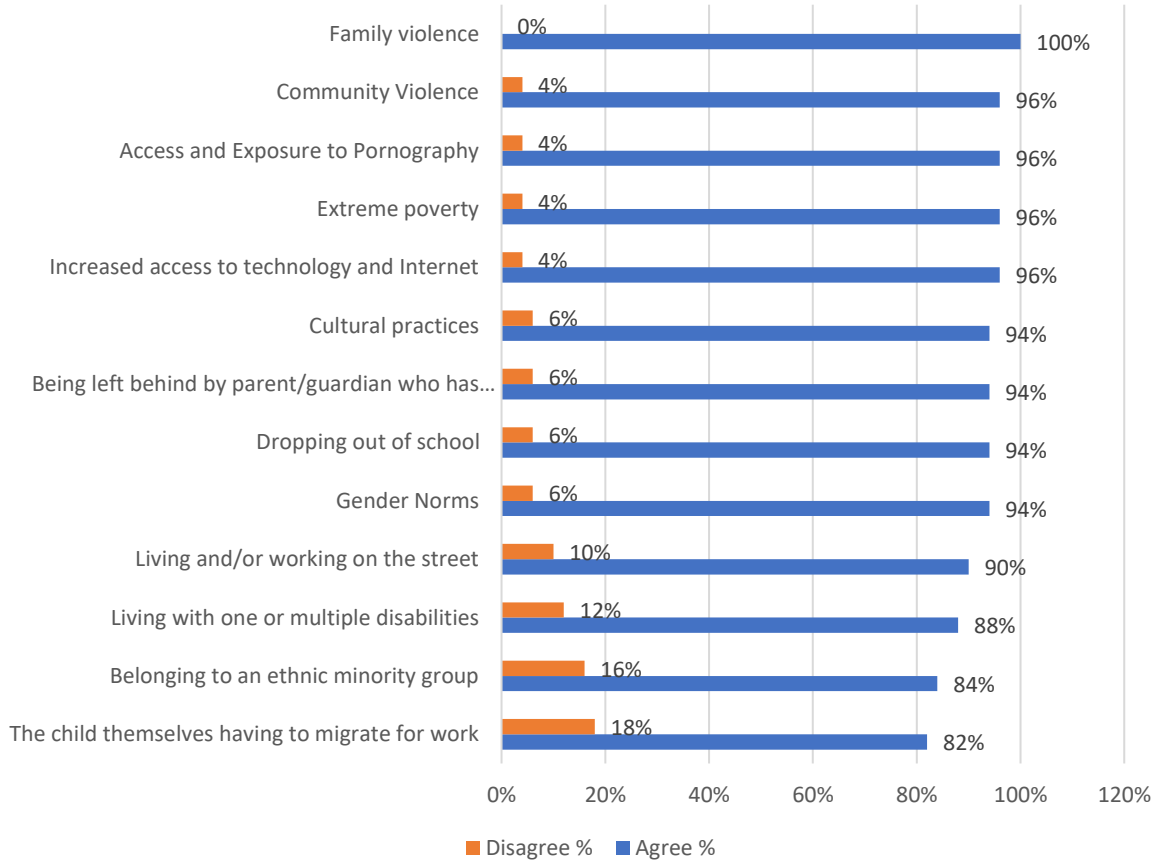


Figure 14. Participants' perceptions of factors about the *child* impacting children's vulnerability to child sexual exploitation.

Figure 14 above shows that there was broad consensus among the respondents regarding their ideas about which of the possible factors about the child can increase vulnerability to sexual abuse and exploitation in general. In Thailand, family violence (100%), community violence (96%), access and exposure to pornography (96%), extreme poverty (96%) and increased access to technology and Internet (96%) were given the highest levels of agreement. As we can see above, all options were ascribed values of agreement exceeding 80%. 16% disagreed that belonging to an ethnic minority group and 18% that child's migration for work impacts their vulnerability to child sexual exploitation.

Additionally, respondents were given the option to comment on other sources of vulnerability in their country, which may not have been included in the survey options, they noted the following:

- Absence of guardians
- Child sexual abuse material can be found generally
- Children not being trained to self-defend and to foresee possible negative results
- Children who are in welfare homes
- Current social norms towards Internet idols
- No prior training on life skills
- Children being in families where parent consumes drugs, have a criminal record as well as have mental and psychological illnesses
- Peers or individuals close by who have behaviours related to sexual abuse

- **Factors about the child identified as increasing vulnerability to OCSEA**

Similarly, as in the case of children's vulnerability to child sexual exploitation in general, respondents were in strong agreement in terms of what factors increase children's vulnerability to OCSEA (Figure 15) – here, all factors were rated above (or equal to) 70%.

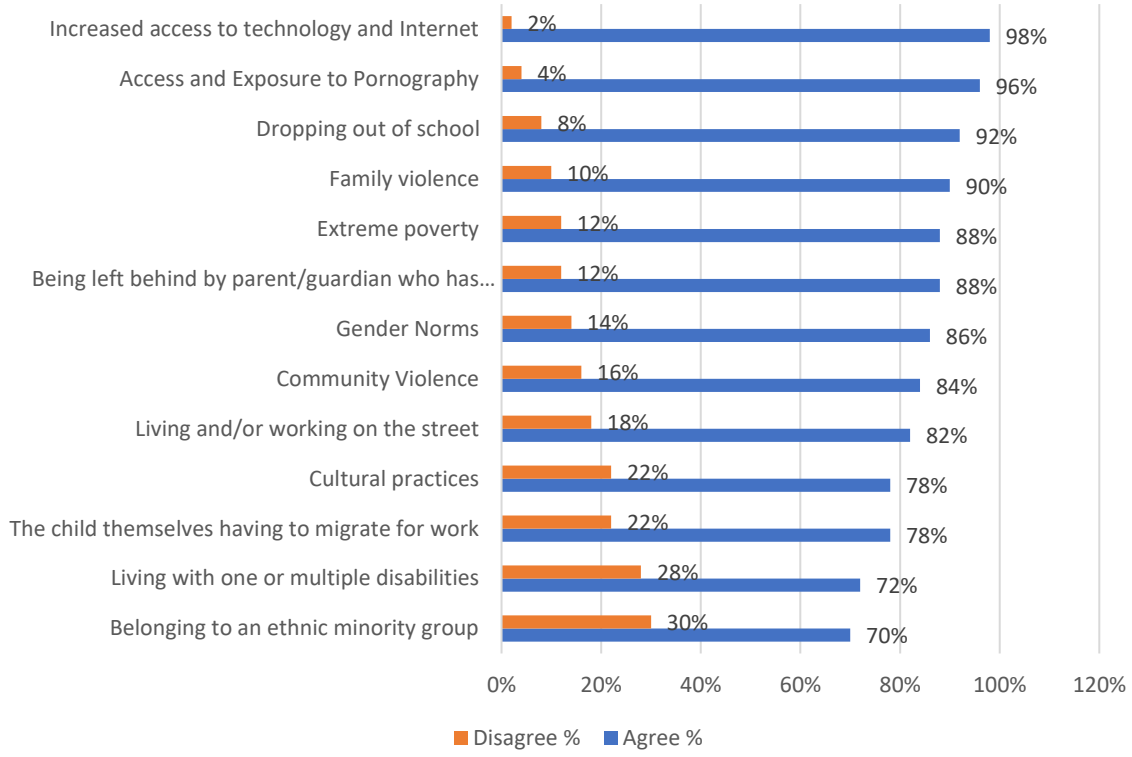


Figure 15. Participants' perceptions of factors about the *child* impacting children's vulnerability to OCSEA.

Participants viewed increased access to Internet and technology (98%), access and exposure to pornography (96%), dropping out of school (92%) and family violence (90%) as top sources of vulnerability to OCSEA. Belonging to an ethnic minority group and living with multiple disabilities were the two factors cited as the least likely sources of vulnerability, with 30% and 28% disagreeing it has an impact on a child's vulnerability to OCSEA.

When respondents were given the option to comment on other sources of vulnerability in their country, which may not have been included in the survey options, they noted the following:

- Desire to acquire and possess (such as telephone, clothes, handbags)
- Access and reception of child sexual abuse material being easy
- Children having access to smartphones without adult's supervision
- Children trusting strangers too much
- Children living in welfare homes
- Current social norms towards Internet idols
- Gender equality
- Knowledge of children's rights and/or various forms of online exploitation
- No law enforcement
- Groups of friends or roommates who have risky behaviours

When participants were asked about the **similarities and differences in children's vulnerability to OCSEA and sexual exploitation in general**, they noted the following:

Similarities:

"No difference because all are factors that reflect power structure in areas of economy, education, technology, social standing and social norms. These elements contribute to increasing vulnerability of the other party (*children/victims)"* (RA3-TH-18-A);

"OCSEA and typical sexual exploitation is currently similar because everyone including members of ethnic minority groups are all able to access technology and can fall prey to online sexual abuse. Victims need not be poor only. Children or adolescents who are better off can also become victims of child sexual exploitation. Without strict legal investigation, one may not know that such exploitation can involve use of Internet or online contacts" (RA3-TH-24-A);

"Risk factors are not different because photos of sexual abuse had been taken in real life before being posted on the virtual platform" (RA3-TH-22-A);

"Same. Detection by an official or an actor of OCSEA is more difficult" (RA3-TH-25-A);

"The same because sexual relations are one form of power display through forcing the weaker party to consent and please the other party. Sexual conducts are a matter that no one want to disclose. In the 4.0 era, technology is an easy channel to abuse others. Many believe that cyber space is a virtual space and whatever is done in this space will not be detected by others" (RA3-TH-39-A);

"The vulnerability factors in both cases are not so different because it is easy to access online content. Any children can access the content equally" (RA3-TH-27-A);

"This is different from typical cases because it is more difficult to identify perpetrators online and to handle the data already widespread online" (RA3-TH-47-A).

Differences:

"A concrete difference between online and off-line cases is poverty. Children who are more at risk of online abuse than other normal children are those who are motivated to do wrong because of financial needs" (RA3-TH-19-A);

"Because children can access Internet from anywhere at any time, they can therefore fall prey at any moment" (RA3-TH-43-A);

"Because it is clearly a disclosure of pictures and information even though there was no direct sexual exploitation" (RA3-TH-08-A);

"Common factors: Children trust strangers and are unable to say no or to self-defend. They have no media literacy and are unaware on potential danger. They are unable to restrain" (RA3-TH-17-A);

"Easy access to online material and repeated persuasion by the media could, in some cases, modify the viewers' perception into trust and social values" (RA3-TH-35-A);

"From experience on assisting OCSEA children, they often come from decent families, belong to middle- or upper-classes and are able to access technology more easily. Most of these children have been abused via online deceit or by grooming by strangers, or are bullied by friends" (RA3-TH-49-A);

"It is easy to disguise one's identity while making contacts online with others as well as hiding from being detected. This has resulted in increased difficulty for child victims to access the justice process" (RA3-TH-14-A);

"Online communication is a channel that provides perpetrators or facilitators with easy and quick access to victims and use their vulnerability to deceive, coerce, persuade and exploit them" (RA3-TH-11-A);

"Risk of online abuse has increased because the child was not able to foresee the danger" (RA3-TH-04-A);

"The child has been affected by COVID-19 pandemic. Parents lost their jobs. Moreover, parents who have had records of commercial sex work may pose a high risk to the child of being sexually abused" (RA3-TH-26-A);

"Vulnerability is lack of life skills to prevent themselves from harm and exploitation" (RA3-TH-50-A).

- **Factors about the society identified as increasing vulnerability to sexual abuse in general**

When asked, "in your country, indicate if you think the following factors about society can increase vulnerability to sexual abuse and exploitation in general" – survey respondents reported the following factors as sources of vulnerability to sexual exploitation in general:

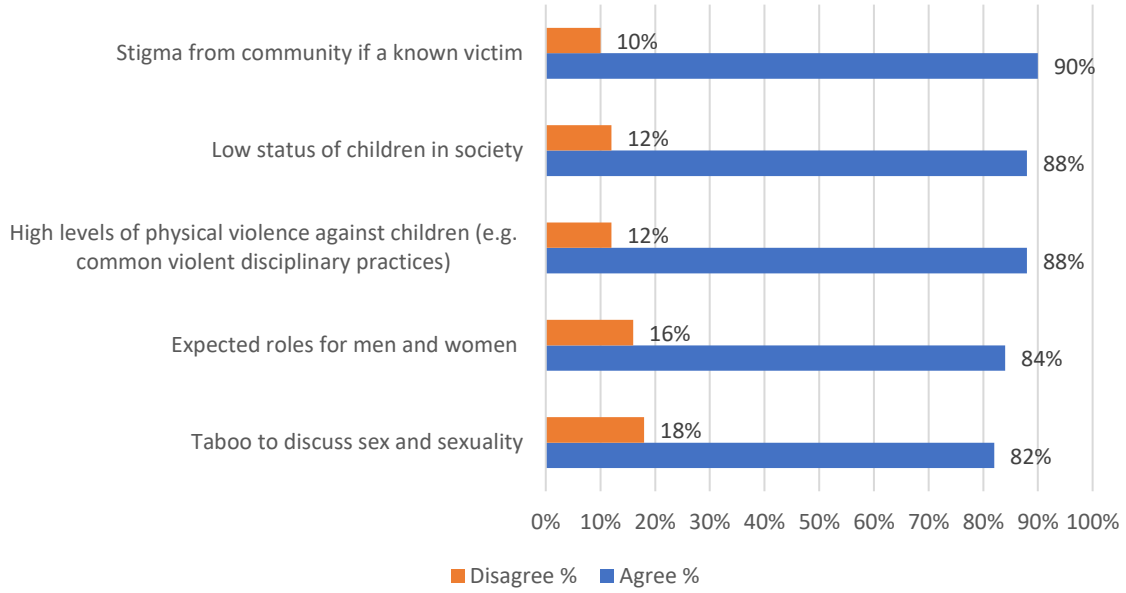


Figure 16. Participants' perceptions of factors about the *society* impacting children's vulnerability to sexual abuse and exploitation in general.

As we can see from the above (Figure 16), there was broad consensus among the respondents regarding their ideas around which of the above factors about society can increase vulnerability to sexual abuse and exploitation in general. The agreement ranged from 82% for taboo to discuss sex and sexuality to 90% for stigma from a community if a known victim. 88% of respondents also agreed that low status of children in society and high levels of physical violence against children increased children's vulnerability to child sexual exploitation in general. 84% also agreed that expected roles for men and women influence children's vulnerability.

When respondents were given the option to comment on other societal sources of vulnerability in their country, which may not have been included in the survey options, they noted that '*vulnerable family relationships*' contribute to children's vulnerability.

- **Factors about the <u>society</u> identified as increasing vulnerability to <u>OCSEA</u>**

When asked, "in your country, indicate if you think the following factors about society can increase vulnerability to ONLINE sexual abuse and exploitation" – survey respondents reported the following factors as sources of vulnerability to online sexual exploitation:

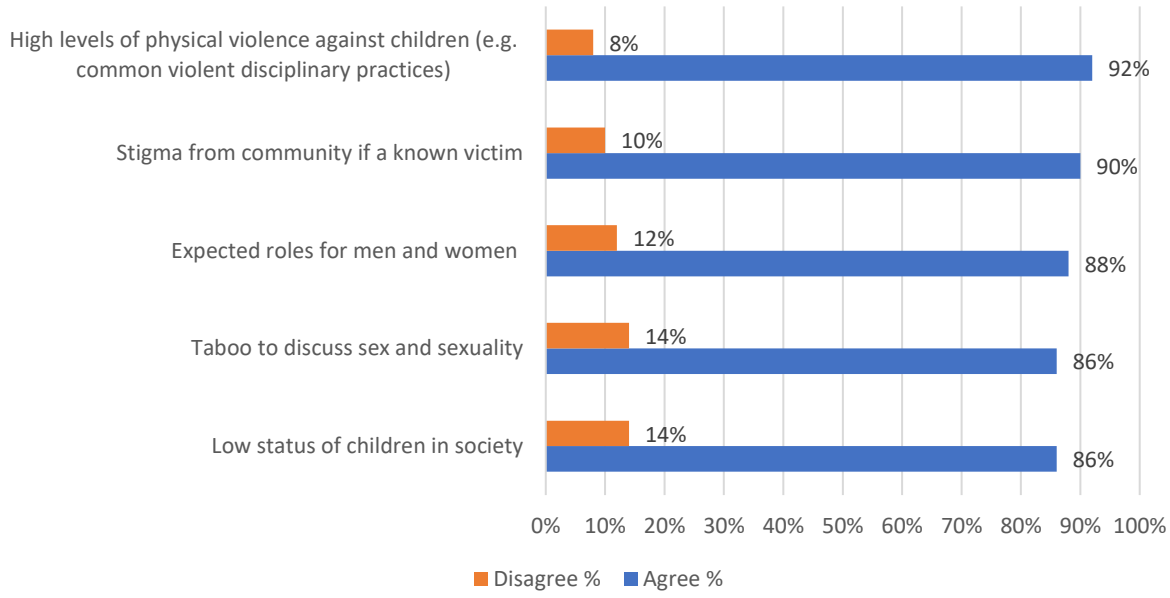


Figure 17. Participants' perceptions of factors about the *society* impacting children's vulnerability to OCSEA.

Near complete consensus was observed when participants were asked to identify if the same factors are sources of increased vulnerability for *online* sexual abuse (Figure 17). Within the options given, respondents identified high levels of physical violence against children as the largest source, at 92%, followed by stigma from community if a victim is known (90%), expected roles for men and women (88%), taboo to discuss sex and sexuality (86%) and lastly, low status of children in society, at 86%.

When respondents were given the option to comment on other sources of vulnerability in their country, which may not have been included in the survey options, they noted the following:

- Parents not paying attention to how telephone or other devices are used by their children
- Power Relationships (woman-man, senior-junior)

When participants were asked specifically **why societal factors increase vulnerability to OCSEA differently to sexual exploitation generally** they often mentioned that conversations around OCSEA are lacking and discussed the issue of self-generated content that is being shared by children online. Some of the responses included:

"Access to children for grooming and sexual abuse and exploitation on Internet can happen to anyone who possesses a device, with similar ratio of female and male adults or children (based on case statistics)" (RA3-TH-24-A);

"Because of the taboo nature of sex and sexuality a lot of children and youth turn to online games, encounters to fulfil their curiosity. Because it is not something discussed in families, children are not being educated about the dangers of online interactions" (RA3-TH-09-A);

"Different. Expression of sexual nature is something that society has difficulty accepting or cannot accept. Therefore, perpetrators or persons at risk choose to suppress this desire and hide it from other

persons close to them or from the society. They find their way to express it online instead" (RA3-TH-48-A);

"It is easy to access sexually explicit content online that is inappropriate and unacceptable according to social norms. Users can access it easily and can imitate the actions up to the point of being obsessive and addicted" (RA3-TH-14-A);

"Main factors of the problem are the fact that everyone has turned more and more obsessive in focusing on smart phone screens. Family members do not spend time face to face as it had been before, thus the risk has increased" (RA3-TH-43-A);

"No difference because there are social classes that determine different relationships between individuals" (RA3-TH-39-A);

"No difference. If this happens to a child, no matter in what way, the child is considered being affected" (RA3-TH-34-A);

"Online media has aggravated the situation and has affected more children widely and deeply" (RA3-TH-11-A)

"Social factors are similar but in the OCSEA, a process of grooming is employed until the children have more trust than children in other sexual abuse context" (RA3-TH-17-A);

"There are no different factors between OCSEA and general sexual exploitation. All factors increase vulnerability" (RA3-TH-50-A);

"Victims of child sexual exploitation and abuse are mostly girls and are abused by family members or persons close to them. However, victims of OCSEA are both boys and girls and most of them are involved in production and dissemination of their own material to strangers and to the public platforms" (RA3-TH-49-A).

Reporting

In order to explore what influences decisions about reporting cases of child abuse, participants were asked to indicate whether they believed particular social and cultural factors influenced reporting child sexual exploitation and OCSEA in Thailand.

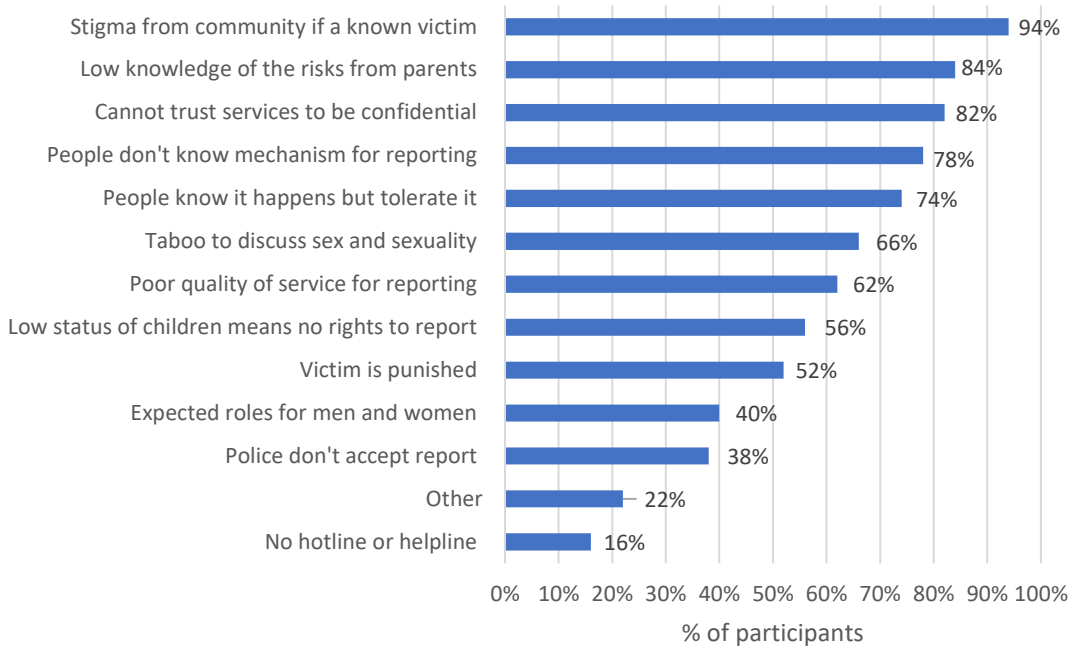


Figure 18. Social and cultural influences on reporting *child sexual exploitation in general*

Figure 18 shows that stigma from community (n=47 – 94%) as well as low knowledge of the risks from parents (84%) and not trusting services to be confidential (82%) were perceived as main factors influencing reporting child sexual exploitation. Interestingly, only 16% of participants perceived no hotline or helpline as a factor influencing reporting child sexual exploitation, suggesting a high availability of such services in Thailand.

As reported by survey facilitators, in addition to the factors mentioned above, lack of reporting in Thailand is also caused by the absence of parental support to child victims. Many children are afraid to share their experiences with their parents in fear of being blamed for what happened to them. Since according to Thai law, crimes against children have to be reported to authorities by parents/designated guardians, that results in many cases not coming to the attention of the police.

Outside of what was reported above, other factors mentioned by participants that influence reporting child sexual exploitation in general included:

- Lack of at least one adult that the child can ask for help or who can give the child both physical and psychological support
- Authorities being slow in taking action
- Children not being aware that they are victims

- Fear (*"They are afraid of leaving home and being kept in a protection home. They are afraid of changing their lifestyle, feeling ashamed and frightened, or feel coerced. They do not have the right pieces of information about how they should conduct their life during the legal process"* (RA3-TH-14-A))
- Corruption within justice system/lack of justice for those of lower economic status or lack of Thai citizenship
- Fear that perpetrators will not be punished and fear of own safety
- Fear that images may be published online and they may be uncovered by mass media
- Government officials not understanding legal provisions and not having skills in explaining legal processes in plain words to those requesting services
- Parents being involved and gaining from this
- People not knowing relevant laws
- Perpetrators having higher status and influence on law enforcement
- *"The justice system may not be friendly enough to victims. There are expenses such as travelling costs or loss of income, loss of time. The trial process is also difficult and complicated"* (RA3-TH-26-A).

When asked, "in your country what prevents reporting specifically about OCSEA?", survey respondents reported the following factors as reasons which prevent the reporting of OCSEA:

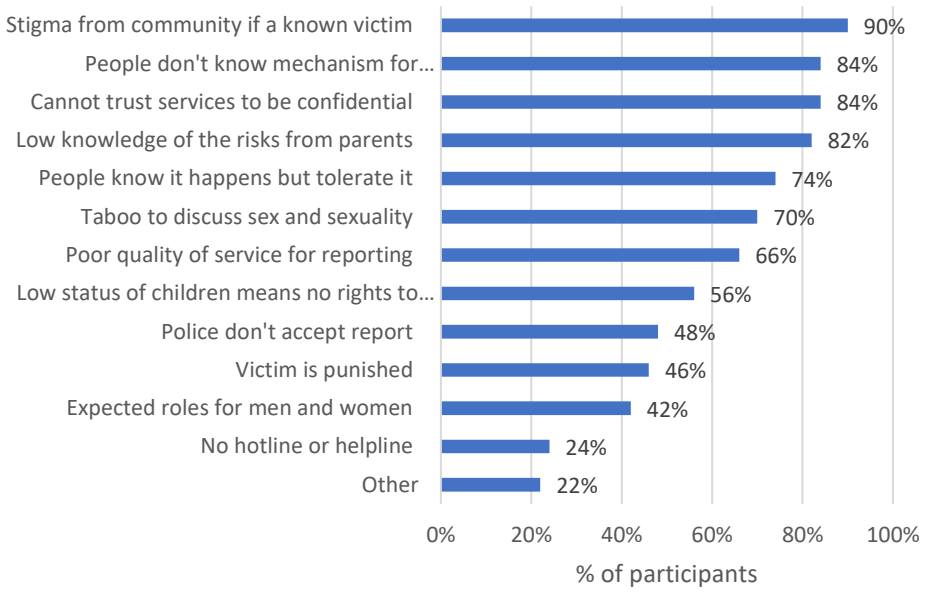


Figure 19. Social and cultural influences on reporting *OCSEA*

In the case of OCSEA it was also stigma from the community (n=45 – 90%) which was rated as the factor having the highest influence on reporting – Figure 19. That was followed by people not knowing the mechanism for reporting and not trusting services to be confidential (n=42 - 84%). Low knowledge of the risks from parents was also rated highly – 82% of respondents considered it as a factor influencing reporting OCSEA. Around half of the participants perceived low status of children (56%), police not accepting reports (48%) victim being punished (46%) and expected roles for men and

women (42%) as factors that influence reporting. Similarly, as in the case of reporting child sexual exploitation, no hotline/helpline was perceived by respondents as having the lowest influence on reporting OCSEA (n=11 -22%), however as one participant mentioned: "*There is a hotline service, but it is not well known. How to follow up after reporting to hotline? It is difficult to call in*" (RA3-TH-11-A).

Outside of what was reported above, other factors mentioned by participants that influence reporting child sexual exploitation in general included:

- Most parents/guardians not being aware of what has happened. (*"There needs to be also a control system of online activities"* (RA3-TH-14-A))
- Corruption within justice system/lack of justice for those of lower economic status or lack of citizenship
- *"The lack of at least one adult from whom the child can ask for help or who can give the child both physical and psychological support. The child does not wish to file a report or is not aware that he is being exploited"* (RA3-TH-32–A)
- Fear that images may be published online and they may be uncovered by mass media
- Not enough female police officers to receive report/complaint
- Police officers who receive reports not understanding how to collect primary digital information
- Victims not being aware that they have been abused or exploited. One may not know whether one's naked images appear in Thailand or not
- When this kind of incident happens, it can become news rapidly
- *"The worry is high because dissemination has gone wide. The victims therefore do not want to disclose their identity or are not ready to protect their rights"* (RA3-TH-18-A).

Availability of Support

Respondents were asked to comment on both the availability and quality of support services for child victims of OCSEA (medical, psychological, legal and reintegration); the following results were observed:

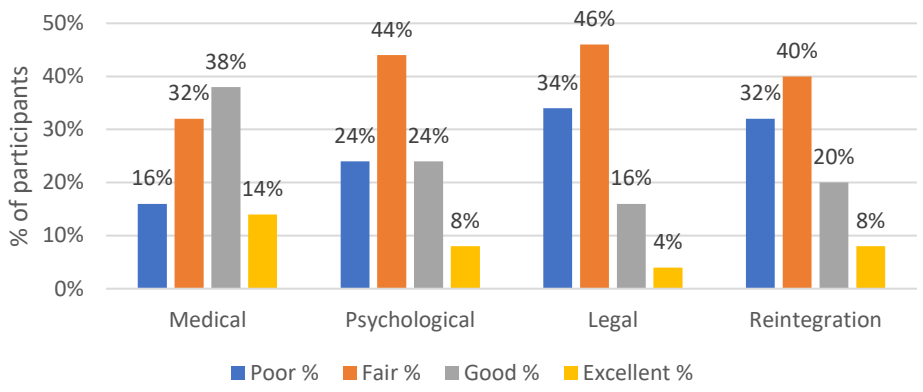


Figure 20. Perception of *Availability* of Services

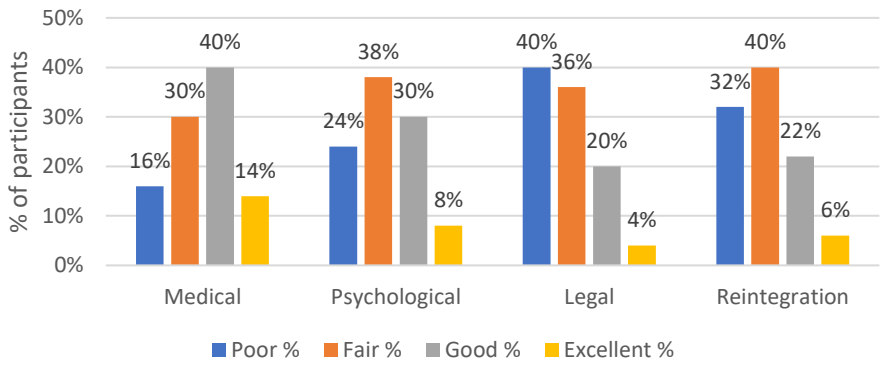


Figure 21. Perception of *Quality* of Services

Figures 20 and 21 show fairly consistent ratings between all services. Both availability and quality of medical services was rated by the majority (70%) as either fair or good and received the highest ratings among all categories. 80% of respondents rated the availability of legal services as poor (34%) or fair (46%) and 76% perceived their quality as either poor (40%) or fair (36%) resulting in the lowest scores among all services. Reintegration services in Thailand were also perceived by the majority as poor or fair receiving only slightly better ratings – both their availability and quality were rated by 72% as either poor (32%) or fair (40%). 44% of frontline social support workers perceived the availability of psychological services as fair and the same number of respondents rated it as poor (24%) and good (24%). The quality of those services received slightly better ratings with 68% describing it as fair (38%) or good (30%), 24% as poor and 8% as excellent.

Government workers selected predominantly 'good' ratings when assessing the availability and quality of services, while NGO-workers gave mostly 'fair'/'good' ratings. None of the government

workers perceived the availability or quality of any of the services as 'poor' and very few NGO workers perceived them as 'excellent'.

When respondents were given the option to explain their appraisals of the quality and availability of services above, in doing so, among others, they noted a lack of follow up mechanisms after reintegration efforts, a need for awareness raising in society and lengthy judicial processes. Some of their comments included:

"Regarding availability for social reintegration of OCSEA cases, there has to be a lot of preparation for service providers and service receivers. Service providers must have the will and strength to assist victims to cope with their mental crisis and medical conditions. Regarding psychological support, the queue for public hospital services is very long while private hospitals are costly. The state cannot respond to this need" (RA3-TH-24-A);

"It's not only that psychosocial services are necessary for the victims but also the review of track records of those working on child protection to ensure that these actors are not [offenders] themselves. In investigating child sexual abuse material as case evidence, there must be measures and codes of conduct as well as periodic reviews of psychological effects on reviewers in order to prevent stress and chances of deviation" (RA3-TH-14-A);

"On a psychological aspect, it is uncertain that this can be done on a continuous basis. Regarding social reintegration, there has been no follow up whether or not the child has well reintegrated" (RA3-TH-22-A);

"Service provision must take into account the best interest of the victims. Support for their reintegration into society is missing because the law has not prescribed it, with an exception of victims who are transferred to a shelter - they will go through some processes" (RA3-TH-17-A);

"Social reintegration is what we are trying to do but families do not cooperate well. There needs to be more awareness-raising and preparation for families because they may not be able to handle sexually abused children who return home" (RA3-TH-27-A);

"Social reintegration still misses follow-up and there is no community management" (RA3-TH-26-A);

"In cases of OCSEA, rehabilitation support relating to work on enhancing cognitive thinking is rare to find. This is necessary because most children/victims are ignorant about what they have encountered or in some cases, children are willing to take risk in order to earn income for self or family" (RA3-TH-18-A);

"There is little understanding of the need for trauma-informed care for this population. There is a focus on outward physical needs more than a holistic restoration process" (RA3-TH-09-A);

"Victims of OCSEA are mostly from typical families and they are often not able to access or not aware of available support services. Most of them wish that prosecution and assistance processes could end as quickly as possible. In reality, however, the trial process is lengthy, and could deter the rehabilitation

process. Victims are thus not able to recover in an appropriate time. Families of victims are then not willing or even refuse to cooperate in the assistance process" (RA3-TH-49-A);

"Not enough female inquiry police for OCSEA cases, often female victims are interview by a male officer who's not sensitive to ask inappropriate questions" (RA3-TH-50-A);

"Increase delivery of services in the community" (RA3-TH-13-A);

"Services for cases of online sexual abuse should be a one-stop-service rather than just reporting to Internet police officers (*according to the Computer Crime Act)"* (RA3-TH-17-A).

To better understand what affects the availability of support services for children, respondents were asked to indicate to what extent they believed particular factors had an influence on the availability of services for children.

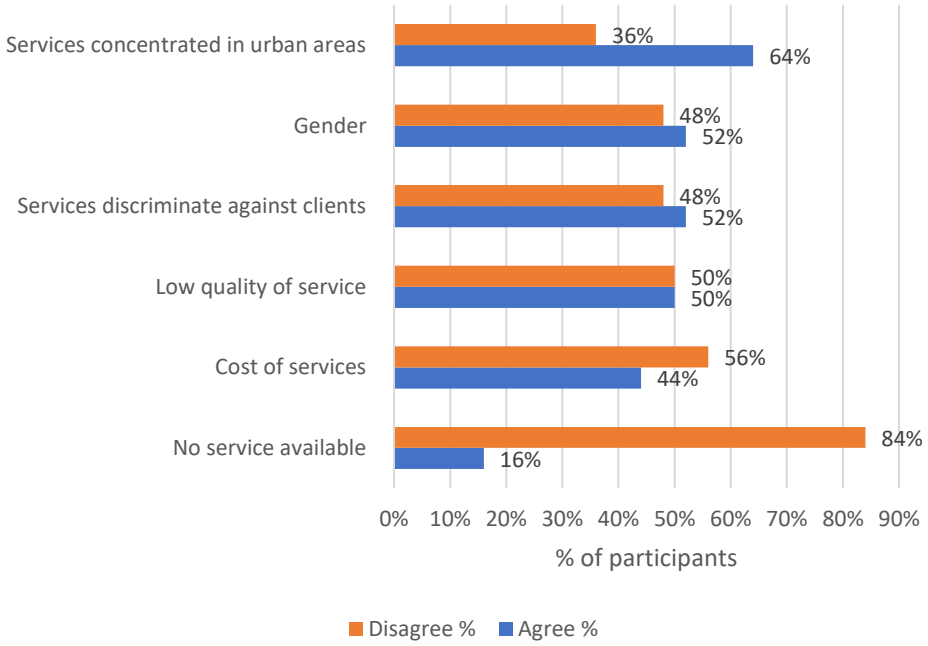


Figure 22. Factors affecting the availability of support services for child victims of *child sexual exploitation*

Figure 22 indicates that the responses varied greatly when assessing the factors having the biggest influence on the availability of support services for children recovering from child sexual exploitation. A positive finding is that 84% of respondents disagreed that there are no services available. 64% indicated however that those services are concentrated in urban areas. Biggest discrepancies were found on gender, discrimination against clients, low quality of services and cost of services - almost the same number of respondents agreed and disagreed that those factors affect the availability of support services for children in Thailand.

When participants were asked to indicate to what extent those same factors affect the availability of support services for child victims of OCSEA, the results were mostly similar (Figure 23), with a few slight differences.

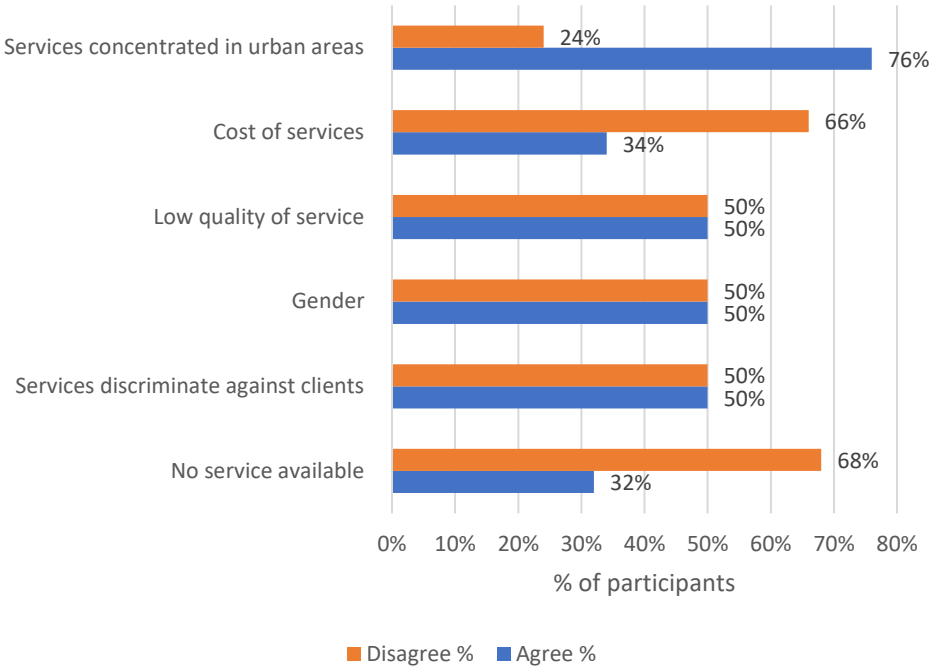


Figure 23. Factors affecting the availability of support services for child victims of *OCSEA*

Here, a smaller number of respondents - 68% -disagreed that there are no support services available (16% less than in cases of child sexual exploitation) and more participants agreed that those services are located in urban areas (76% compared to 64% for child sexual exploitation victims). Fewer participants also perceived the cost of services as a factor influencing the availability of those services (34% comparing to 44% in case of child sexual exploitation). Half of respondents agreed and disagreed that factors such as low quality of services, gender and discrimination against clients have an influence on the availability of services for child victims of OCSEA.

Investigations and Convictions

Participants were asked to estimate the amount of OCSEA cases they managed in the last 12 months and determine approximately how many of those resulted in investigations and convictions. It should be noted, that those indications were merely estimates, not reliable counts of official cases.

24 participants indicated that in the last 12 months at least one case of OCSEA cases they managed directly resulted in a complaint filed to the local police/judicial authorities. (Total 171 cases estimated).

27 participants indicated that in the last 12 months at least one of the cases they managed resulted in an investigation (Total 116 estimated).

21 participants indicated that in the last 12 months at least one of the cases they managed resulted in a conviction (Total 46 estimated).

The number of reported cases represent only a fraction of the number of OCSEA incidents that we expect are occurring, the majority of which continue to never come to the attention of social workers or law enforcement.

A number of frontline social support workers mentioned that there are multiple reasons why cases do not get investigated/perpetrators do not get convicted. Some of the reasons included the difficulty of gathering evidence, law enforcement's lack of knowledge and understanding of the crime and society's perception of OCSEA as a private matter. When given the opportunity to elaborate on the matter, some of the respondents mentioned:

"It is difficult to prosecute because it is online material. Individuals involved are in different locations. In each case, the intervention involves not only police officers but also social workers, forensic scientists to collect evidence, and NGO workers to support children and to identify cases in a multidisciplinary way. It is therefore difficult to work" (RA3-TH-22-A);

"Prosecuting sexual offences needs to rely on use of sophisticated technological equipment which government agencies are not able to acquire. And, in order to access private information of the suspect, the authority needs a court order which is not entrust" (RA3-TH-39-A);

"Several sectors or individuals tend to believe that sexual exploitation online is a private matter. As long as the public does not know about it or no further abuse takes place (*the parties meet and depart without any harm), the matter can be let to rest. That is to say the public will not pay any attention as long as the matter is not disclosed"* (RA3-TH-48-A).

Law Enforcement and Government Support

In order to understand frontline social support workers perceptions of the support offered by local law enforcement on the issue of OCSEA, respondents were asked to answer, "Based on your work which best describes local law enforcement's: 1) awareness of OCSEA crimes; and 2) response to OCSEA crimes. Their responses to this question are depicted in Figure 24.

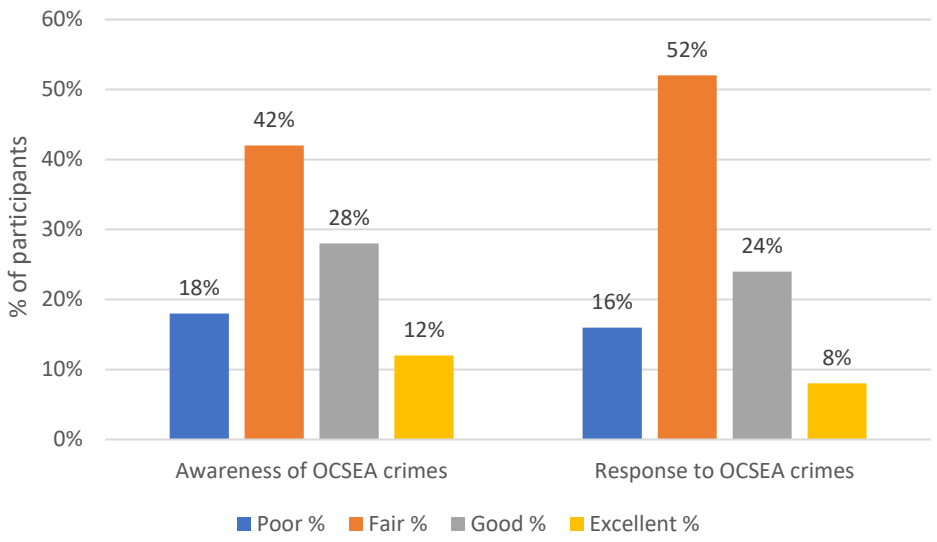


Figure 24. Participants' perceptions of local law enforcement awareness and response to OCSEA

Based on the above, we can see that both local law enforcement's awareness and responses were rated similarly. Awareness was assessed to be slightly better than response, however both questions resulted in at least 60% assessing them as poor or fair in these areas. 28% rated awareness of OCSEA crimes and 24% the response to OCSEA crimes as good and 12% rated the awareness and 8% the response as excellent. 'Fair' ratings of law enforcement's response to OCSEA were the most frequently selected option both by government and non-government workers.

Respondents were given the option to provide additional comments to qualify their answers above. Some of their justifications are highlighted below:

"Awareness is higher among law enforcers who are dealing with cases than among those in other sections. The responsiveness to case handling may not be outstanding because cases have been few. It is either not clearly seen how perpetrators have been punished" (RA3-TH-27-A);

"For law enforcers i.e., Police Bureau responsible for suppression of child sexual abuse material and child sexual abuse online and Provincial Attorney General Offices, Office of General Attorney responsible for combating human trafficking, who have understanding on how to handle such cases. Otherwise, police stations or local police officers need to learn more from specialists" (RA3-TH-24-A);

"General law enforcers such as local police officers or government officials who are not in charge of this matter, do not have knowledge and understanding about OCSEA. They have not any awareness. They are unable or believe that they are unable to assist victims. However, law enforcers of specialised units can better handle cases of victims more effectively and speedily" (RA3-TH-49-A);

"Government has not put enough emphasis on this problem" (RA3-TH-05-A);

"Government, implying macro-level administration, is not interested in issues related to OCSEA because it does not have relevant information that could disclose the magnitude and frequency of the problem, its impact at the national level. This is because there is no agency that works at a multi-dimensional level" (RA3-TH-14-A);

"In general, there is a support system, but its quality may not be optimum (*or it may be good at an individual/actor level). At present, there is a tendency to find more OCSEA cases due to technological advancement. It is a challenge for the government to promote social awareness and establish a more efficient support system both for case handling and for other kinds of assistance"* (RA3-TH-18-A);

"Law enforcers are enthusiastic, making efforts and paying attention. There is an agency set up specially to resolve this problem such as Thailand Internet Crimes Against Children that works to protect the right to privacy of the victims" (RA3-TH-26-A);

"Most of the law enforcement lacked skills and technical knowledge to understand OCSEA. They're concerned about other crimes more than OCSEA" (RA3-TH-50-A);

"Only a small number of actors are aware of the problems and able to work on OCSEA cases. Efforts have been made to assign more officials with mandate and specialisation in handling online cases" (RA3-TH-11-A);

"Police officers have a stereotype about children with behavioural problems by viewing them as not worthy of any support. This negative view about this group of children can affect service provision" (RA3-TH-32–A);

"There are support agencies but their quality or understanding on working with children online is not as effective as it should be" (RA3-TH-19-A);

"Assistance for OCSEA cases is rather complicated because local police officers are not capable to handle material released online. There is a need to request specialised agencies to remove the material directly, but they are still not able to remove all material or to access all material being posted online. This is a challenge for concerned authorities" (RA3-TH-19-A).

To better understand the ratings above, participants were next asked about their perceptions of the quality of efforts to address OCSEA (Figure 25).

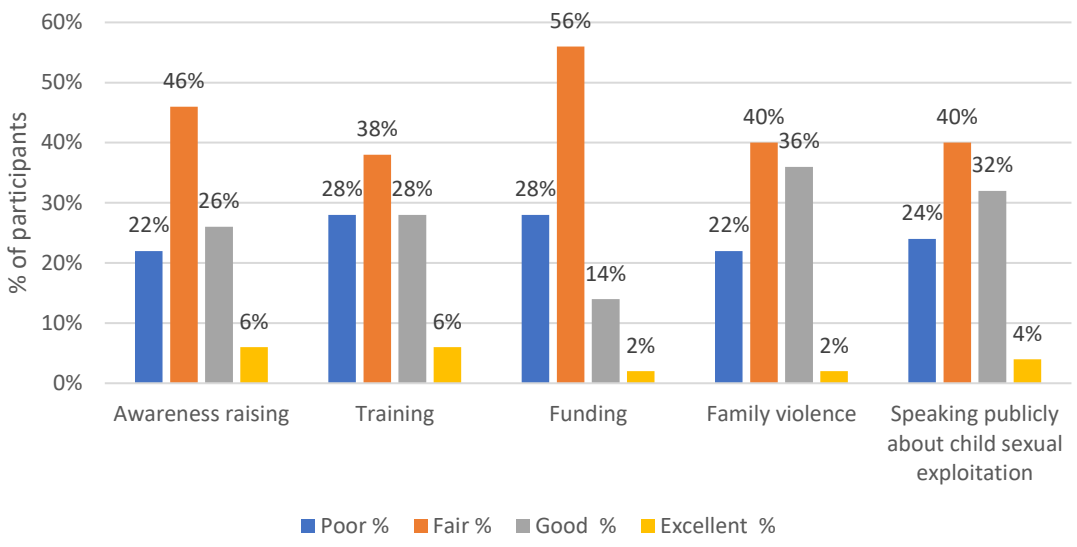


Figure 25. Participants' perceptions of quality of government efforts to address OCSEA

Limited government funding (rated as poor or fair by 84% of respondents) was most frequently selected as a major obstacle to provide adequate services to child victims of OCSEA. Awareness raising, training, preventing family violence and speaking publicly about child sexual exploitation were rated by the majority of respondents as either fair or good.

Next, frontline social support workers surveyed were asked to assess the collaboration on OCSEA between non-government sectors such as NGOs, tourism companies, Internet companies etc. The results are illustrated in Figure 26.

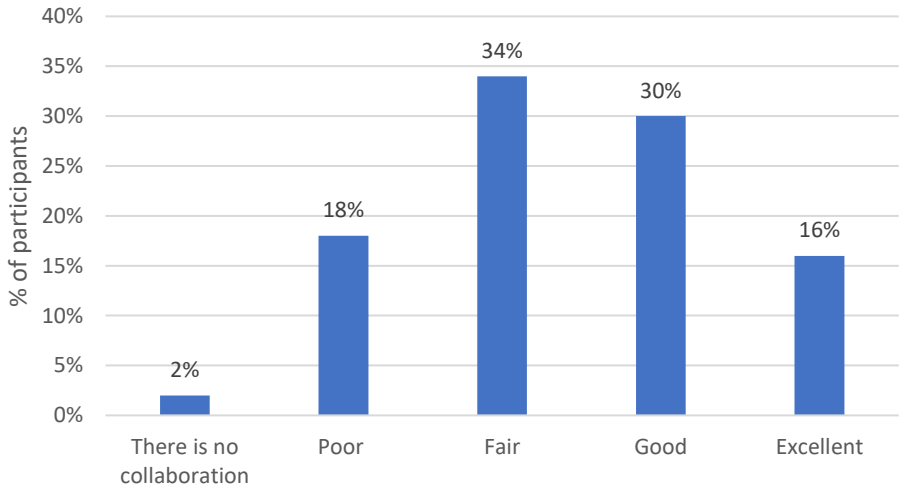


Figure 26. Participants perceptions of collaboration on OCSEA between non-government

As we can see in the figure above, the majority of respondents rated the collaboration between non-government actors as fair (n=17 - 34%) or good (n=15 - 30%). 18% (n=9) reported these collaborations to be poor, 16% (n=8) to be excellent and 2% (n=1) claimed there is no collaboration between the partners. All the 'poor' responses came from non-government workers.

Public Awareness

Lastly, the survey attempted to ascertain the levels of public awareness around the issues of OCSEA in Thailand. In order to do so, frontline social support workers were asked to subjectively appraise young people's awareness, parent's awareness and the general public's awareness of OCSEA – their responses are illustrated in Figure 27.

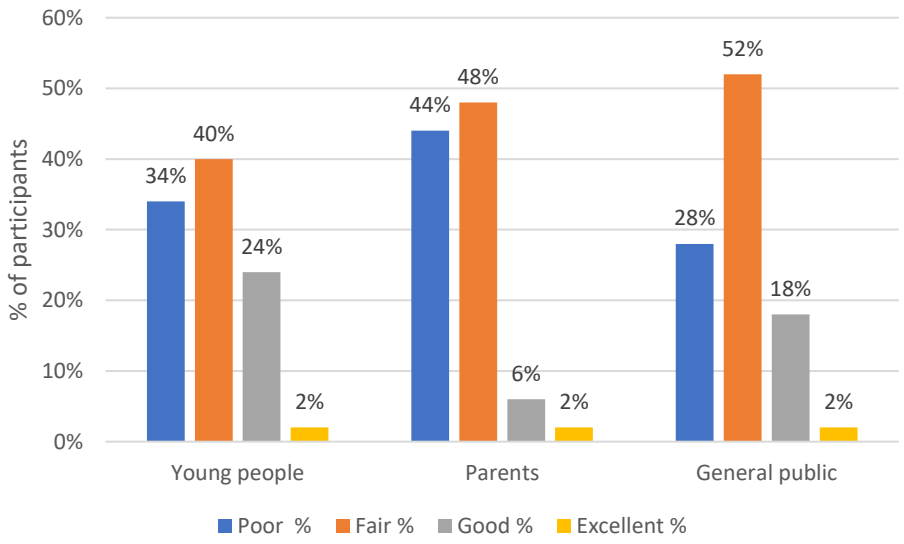


Figure 27. Awareness of OCSEA

A third of frontline social support workers (34%) described young people's awareness as poor, 40% described it as fair and 24% described awareness as good. Only 2% reported OCSEA awareness as excellent. This was more or less similar to parents, though decidedly fewer reported good awareness (92% said poor or fair). The general public's awareness was perceived as poor by a third of respondents (28%), fair by 52% and 18% as good. Similarly, as in the case of young people and parents, only 2% of workers rated the general public's awareness as excellent.

Respondents were given the option to provide additional comments to qualify their answers above. Some of the responses included:

"Awareness education cannot reach the target population. Often it is conducted on festive days. More than 80% of sexually abused children who came to the Foundation have never seen any state media campaign messages because they thought they were not in a risk group, especially children from a well-off background have not thought they could be victims" (RA3-TH-17-A);

"Based on statistics, usage of pornographic websites in Thailand is still high (*such as Pornhub) which shows that both children and adults still consume pornographic material. In this way, they can become both victims and perpetrators. If awareness education is not provided early enough, starting from upper primary school, to inform children of the danger of the digital world and behaviours of perpetrators, the problem may become out of hand. Efforts should be made to increase knowledge of*

legal specialists such as police officers, prosecutors and judges so that they can better understand that online abuses can be qualified as human trafficking or sexual exploitation" (RA3-TH-24-A);

"Family members are aware of this problem, but the child has underestimated the matter. Most children will choose not to talk with their parents but rather with their peers. Friends of the same ages often have the same view on the matter that it is something normal. Thus, the child is hardly aware of the problem or that his/her right is going to be violated" (RA3-TH-32–A);

"Information is lacking in awareness raising process on "harmful material" or production of such material that is harmful to children, including preventing children from being victimised. Case screening and deterrence is still ineffective and inefficient" (RA3-TH-14-A);

"Parents are aware of the problem but they do not have time to supervise their children" (RA3-TH-22-A);

"They became aware and excited only when there is news about victims and they soon forget about these. They think this is something that will not happen to them and that they would not be in such an unfortunate situation or believe that they would be able to handle such risks" (RA3-TH-11-A);

"This is because online material, cyber operators or even Internet idols may demonstrate sexual gestures openly and in a controversial manner through their dressing styles or other applications. These have posed greater risks to the public who views these actions as a norm" (RA3-TH-48-A).