DISRUPTING HARM

***PRESS BRIEFING - Launch: 18 March 2022***

**Negative and stigmatizing attitudes about sex makes children vulnerable to online child sexual exploitation and abuse in Tanzania**

The ground-breaking, evidence-led research report, *Disrupting Harm in Tanzania*, recently found that an estimated 200,000 children[1] were victims of serious instances of online sexual exploitation and abuse in Tanzania in the last year alone. The research revealed that children were subjected to harmful experiences, such as being blackmailed to engage in sexual activities or grooming.

Lack of awareness and understanding about online child sexual exploitation and abuse in Tanzania makes children vulnerable to harm. In fact, 98 per cent of frontline workers surveyed believed that attitudes about discussing sex puts children at a greater risk. Frontline workers reported that online child sexual exploitation and abuse is a 'new' issue that many do not understand. One frontline worker said, *"Online child sexual exploitation and abuse is still a very new issue for most of us. Even when you tell the police about online child exploitation and abuse, it will take a long time for them to understand."*

Additionally, surveyed frontline workers said that many children were not aware of what is considered unacceptable sexual behaviour. This shows a serious lack of awareness and education, which could lead to greater harm. In fact, only 30% of internet-using children surveyed in Tanzania had received any sex education. One frontline worker said, "*Most victims of online and offline sexual exploitation are not aware that they were abused*."

Despite the concerning lack of awareness and understanding, online abuse is happening. *Disrupting Harm in Tanzania* found that in the past year:

- An estimated 200,000 children[2] were victims of serious instances of online sexual exploitation and abuse in Tanzania in the last year alone.
- 3% of internet-using children aged 12-17 surveyed were offered money or gifts online to engage in sexual acts in person.
- 2% of the surveyed children were offered money or gifts in exchange for sexual images.
- 6% of children received unwanted requests online to talk about sex.
- 3% of children were asked to share images and videos showing their private parts to others.

Additionally, due to the stigmas about sex and lack of education, children who experienced sexual abuse and exploitation may not know how to report. The report found:

- 82% of the internet-using children surveyed said they did not know how to report harmful content on social media.
- 67% said they did not know where to get help if they or a friend were subjected to sexual harassment or abuse.

To tackle online child sexual exploitation and abuse, *Disrupting Harm in Tanzania* notes that government authorities need to act, fund, and educate. This includes building greater understanding and awareness of the issues and changing attitudes about discussing sex to empower children to ask for help.

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[1] *Disrupting Harm in Tanzania* research found that 4% of internet-using children aged 12-17 were victims of grave instances of online sexual exploitation and abuse in the past year. Scaled to the population, this represents an estimated 200,000 children.

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**About *Disrupting Harm***

In early 2019, the Global Partnership to End Violence Against Children, through its Safe Online initiative, invested $7 million to develop *Disrupting Harm*, a holistic and innovative research project that aims to better understand how digital technology facilitates the sexual exploitation and abuse of children.

Safe Online brought together and funded three organisations – **ECPAT**, **INTERPOL** and the **UNICEF Office of Research – Innocenti** – to undertake new research in 13 countries across Eastern and Southern Africa and Southeast Asia. This type of holistic research and assessment is unique. The methodology developed for these assessments has been implemented across the 13 countries and can be used by other countries in the future.

Full report can be read here: https://www.end-violence.org/disrupting-harm#country-reports

***What is Online child sexual exploitation and abuse (OCSEA)?***

Online child sexual exploitation and abuse (OCSEA) refers to situations involving digital, internet and communication technologies at some point during the continuum of abuse or exploitation. OCSEA can occur fully online or through a mix of online and in-person interactions between offenders and children.

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