

**PRESS BRIEFING - Launch: 16 November 2021**

**BREAKING – New report shows that harmful stigma and victim blaming deters children from reporting experiences of online child sexual exploitation and abuse in Uganda.**

Ground-breaking research delivered by [ECPAT](#), [INTERPOL](#), and the [UNICEF Office of Research – Innocenti](#), funded through the End Violence Partnership’s Safe Online Initiative, *Disrupting Harm in Uganda* is an evidence-led report that outlines the harrowing realities of online child sexual exploitation and abuse in Uganda.

Key findings in the *Disrupting Harm in Uganda* report include:

- **Boys and girls were equally likely to experience online child sexual exploitation and abuse.** The survey of 1,016 internet-using children found that similar proportions of boys and girls are subjected to differing forms of online child sexual exploitation and abuse, such as grooming or being offered gifts or money in exchange for sexual images or videos.
- **98% of official reports of sexual offences to the Uganda Police Force were made by girls.** Only 2% of official reports in defilement cases were made by boys between 2017-2019. As boys are experiencing online child sexual exploitation and abuse at the same rate as girls, this may suggest that boys are not reporting their abuse.
- **Too many children are not reporting for fear of stigma or belief it will not lead to change.**
  - 1/3rd of children surveyed in Uganda who had experienced online child sexual exploitation and abuse did not tell anyone about their experiences.
  - Common reason for not reporting incidents of online child sexual exploitation and abuse was "not knowing where to go or whom to tell."
  - 10% of the surveyed children were offered money or gifts for sexual images or videos of themselves in the past year. 31% of those children didn't tell anyone about it.
  - 9% of children surveyed said that they had sexual images of themselves shared without their consent in the past year. This represents approximately 215,000 children in Uganda.
- **Child advocate professionals said victim blaming by the police sometimes deterred children from reporting.**
  - Law enforcement, the justice system, and social services lack awareness, capacity, and resources to respond to cases of online child sexual abuse and exploitation. Some important online child sexual exploitation and abuse-related legislation, policies, and standards are not yet enacted in Uganda.
  - Some children interviewed for *Disrupting Harm in Kenya* said that reporting processes were re-traumatizing because children were required to re-tell their traumatic experiences throughout the process.
  - In Uganda from 2017 to 2019, our interviews illustrated that children were rarely able to bring cases to justice through the court system.

The *Disrupting Harm in Uganda* provides actionable recommendations for the government, lawmakers, industry, and other actors in Uganda to strengthen the national prevention and response to this crime.

Key actions include:

- The Government of Uganda to adopt the National Plan of Action to prevent and respond to online child sexual abuse and exploitation.
- Develop education programmes with children that reflect their perspectives of online risks, and techniques they can use to keep themselves safe.
- Properly define and criminalise all forms of online child sexual exploitation and abuse.
- Review the Child Online Protection Handbook and disseminate it widely to ensure a common understanding of online child sexual exploitation and abuse.



- Accede to the Convention on Cyber Security and Personal Data Protection adopted by the African Union in 2014.
- Establish and maintain a connection to INTERPOL's ICSE database. Adequately investigate international online child sexual exploitation and abuse referrals. Put an effective hotline in place with access to hotlines in other countries.
- Develop detailed ethical guidelines for police on how to interview children. Ensure that both specialised male and female officers are recruited and available whenever required.
- Develop guidelines on child-friendly and victim-friendly justice. Guarantee that child victims do not have to face offenders in court, and that online child sexual exploitation and abuse cases are heard without undue delays.
- Legally oblige internet service providers to retain data, filter/block/take down child sexual abuse materials and comply promptly with law enforcement requests for information.

### **About *Disrupting Harm***

In early 2019, the [End Violence Partnership](#), 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 new and unique. The methodology developed for these assessments has been implemented across the 13 countries and can be used by other countries in the future.

### **About *Disrupting Harm in Uganda***

Data collection took place from early 2020 through to early 2021 with the cooperation of the Government of Uganda 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 online child sexual exploitation and abuse in Uganda.

A range of statistical data was gathered for 2017-2019. Surveys were conducted with internet-using children and their caregivers in early 2021, and front-line service providers from private and civil society in late 2020. Interviews were held with high-level government officials, law enforcement officials, justice professionals, and child victims of online child sexual abuse and exploitation and their caregivers. In addition, trauma-informed expert practitioners led several unstructured one-on-one conversations with survivors of online child sexual abuse and exploitation.

The analysis for *Disrupting Harm in Uganda* was finalised in May 2021. The recommendations were discussed further at a national consultation on 19 August 2021.

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

(\*) Definition of 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.