SCROL
Research Summary

Philippines

SCROL
Safety for Children and their Rights OnLine

NATIONALE POSTCODE LOTERIJ

Terre des Hommes Netherlands

Understanding Parents and Caregivers' Roles in Preventing and Responding to Online Sexual Exploitation of Children (OSEC)

This research study explores the crucial role of parents and caregivers in preventing and responding to Online Child Sexual Exploitation (OSEC) in the Philippines. As part of Terre des Hommes Netherlands' (TdH NL) broader Safety for Children and their Rights OnLine (SCROL) programme, which spans Cambodia, Kenya, Nepal, and the Philippines, this study examines how parental involvement affects children's vulnerability or resilience to OSEC. Collaborating with local partners, the research investigates parenting norms, digital challenges, and children's vulnerabilities, with special attention to marginalised groups.

Context

Among Filipino children aged 12-17, 95% use the internet, with 20% reporting online sexual exploitation and abuse in 2021 (ECPAT, INTERPOL, and UNICEF, Disrupting Harm in the Philippines, 2022). This high internet usage increased during the COVID-19 pandemic, with children spending more time online for both education and entertainment. OSEC is a growing concern that requires involvement from parents, caregivers, and other stakeholders. The Philippines faces particular challenges, with victims becoming younger and both genders equally at risk, though boys and children with diverse sexual orientations and gender identities (SOGIE) often receive less protection. The situation is further complicated by economic factors, with data showing increased vulnerability in areas where parents work overseas and in low-income communities where digital literacy rates are lower.
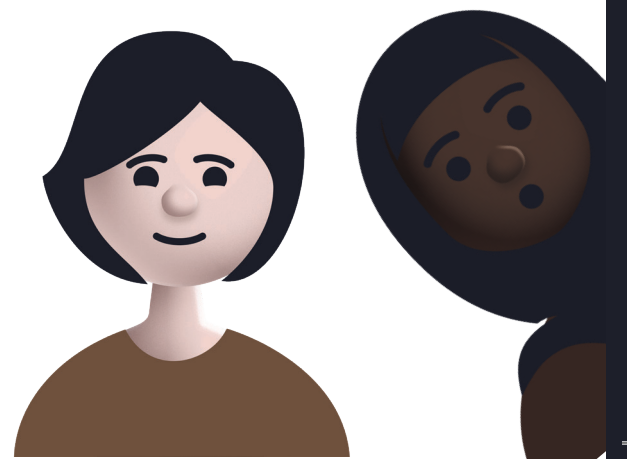
Research Objectives

1. To assess parents/ caregivers' engagement in addressing OSEC in the Philippines.
2. To understand how Filipino parenting/ caregiver norms and practices can enhance children and young people's (CYP) risk or capacity to OSEC, including intersecting identity factors.
3. To understand what services, programmes, and supports regarding child protection and OSEC are available to parents/ caregivers in the Philippines.

Research Methodology

Using a strengths-based, child-centred approach, the research collected data through 13 Focus Group Discussions (FGD), 5 with parents, 8 with children, and 23 Key Informant Interviews (KII) with education and social work professionals, with a total of 110 participants. KIIs interviews included children with disabilities, LGBTQIA+ youth, and OSEC survivors. Age-appropriate methods were used: role-playing for ages 9-12 and agreement scales for ages 16-17. The study was conducted under ethical oversight from Davao del Norte State College.

Limitations

- The research was geographically confined to four areas in Cebu - the municipalities of Daanbantayan, Bantayan, Santa Fe, and Naga City, thereby limiting the generalizability of the findings to the whole country.
- There was potential bias in recruiting the 110 respondents through FGDs and KIIs due to the approach employed by local contacts.
- Some participants may have been reluctant to discuss sensitive topics despite using child-friendly research methods.

Key Findings

Children's Online Activities

Social Media & Gaming: Most children use Facebook, Messenger, Instagram, and TikTok.

Online Threats: Girls as young as nine receive unsolicited romantic messages from adult men. Boys face unique risks through online gaming and social media scams, making them vulnerable to OSEC. Younger children aged 9-12 have personal devices but lack awareness of safety measures that older groups employ.

Privacy risks: Many children share personal information online without understanding the consequences.

> *"Many scammers pretend to be 13 years old but are much older. I didn't experience this myself, but I know someone who did. They claimed a certain age, but then the person revealed they were in their 20s while saying they were just 13."*
>
> **- Child from Cebu**

Parental Involvement & Challenges

Digital Divide: Many parents lack the digital literacy to guide their children's online behaviour.

Communication Barriers: Children avoid reporting online risks to parents, fearing punishment or excessive reaction.

Protective Parenting Strategies: Parents who actively engage with their children about online risks create safer environments.

Systemic Gaps in Legal and Policy Frameworks

The Anti-OSAEC Law (RA 11930) does recognize the responsibilities of parents in prevention and judicial processes. However its implementation remains limited, notably because of insufficient funding. Parents in rural and low-income areas do not have access to education about the law's requirements and lack digital skills.

Schools lack specific policies addressing OSEC, leaving teachers without proper guidance.

Law enforcement agencies face case backlogs and insufficient cybercrime training.

Reporting mechanisms are unclear and underutilised by parents and children.

Socioeconomic and Cultural Factors

Impact of Migration: Many Filipino children with parents working overseas face weakened supervision, increasing OSEC vulnerability.

COVID-19 Effects: The pandemic increased screen time among children, heightening their exposure to online risks.

Gender & Intersectional Vulnerabilities: Boys and LGBTQIA+ youth face higher exploitation risks due to receiving less parental guidance.

Protective Factors

Supportive family networks:
Parents, especially in migrant families, rely on grandparents and extended family members—particularly aunts—for caregiving support.

Parents and caregivers' desire to protect their children:
Parents are strongly willing to enhance their protective strategies and seek an understanding of available reporting pathways and services.

Protective interventions:
While communities offer parenting programmes and OSEC prevention activities, limited resources restrict their reach. Current interventions focus on awareness campaigns, advocacy, capacity building, and community-based protection. Some NGOs address economic vulnerability as well.

"Now, parents are more aware of the online landscape, which adds to their responsibility. They used to have only offline responsibilities when it came to their children, but now they must also monitor their children's online presence."

- NGO Staff, Cebu

Risks Factors

Limited knowledge and attitudes towards OSEC:

Caregivers show limited understanding of OSEC dynamics while strongly disapproving of it as a means of income. Though aware of reporting channels (barangay, local social welfare office, and police), many find the process confusing and unclear.

Intersectional vulnerabilities:

CYPs with additional vulnerabilities—such as mild intellectual disabilities, diverse SOGIE, or previous OSEC victimisation—face unique challenges requiring specialised protection approaches. These groups often experience social rejection and peer bullying.

Community knowledge and attitudes towards OSEC:

Communities demonstrate limited OSEC understanding, with some workers normalising exploitative behaviours, leading to dismissive attitudes that overlook serious concerns.

CYPs' help-seeking behaviours:

Children rarely share online concerns with adults, believing they won't understand or will overreact. While CYPs think they can handle online threats independently, this worries their parents. Fearing punishment, they prefer confiding in friends rather than adults.

Filipino parenting and protective abilities:

Filipino parenting combines authoritarian and authoritative approaches. Parents are interested in learning about effective discipline and child development. Though many parents lack digital literacy skills—limiting their ability to monitor online activities—they implement protective strategies through open communication, healthy digital habits, clear boundaries, and child empowerment.

Barriers to caregivers' participation:

Socioeconomic challenges and cultural norms limit caregiver involvement in protective programmes. Many feel uncomfortable discussing OSEC, fearing it reflects poorly on their parenting abilities.

Recommendations

For Parents & Caregivers
- **Promote Open Communication:** Encourage children to discuss online experiences without fear of punishment.
- **Join Parenting & Digital Literacy Programmes:** Equip parents with tools for online safety.
- **Monitor Internet Use:** Set clear digital boundaries and educate children about online risks and privacy rights.

For Communities & Schools
- **Integrate OSEC Awareness into School Curricula:** Schools should educate students on online safety and reporting mechanisms.
- **Strengthen Parent-Teacher Collaboration:** Schools and families should cooperate to protect children from OSEC risks.
- **Train Educators & Case Workers:** Equip teachers and social workers with OSEC, trauma-informed responses, and child protection laws.

For NGOs & Policymakers
- **Integrated Community Programmes:** Unite financial and digital literacy education for parents through online safety training, economic support, and livelihood programmes—all connected to child protection education and RA 11930 compliance.
- **Parent Support Resources:** Offer trauma-informed training to help parents identify signs of OSEC and respond appropriately when children disclose incidents.
- **Online Safety Training for CYPs:** Develop age-appropriate and CYP-centered workshops and interactive programmes to teach CYPs
- **Enhance Digital Safeguards:** Work with tech companies to improve privacy settings, content moderation and improve reporting mechanisms.
- **Expand Economic Support Programmes:** Address financial vulnerabilities that push families toward exploitative online practices.
- **Integrated Community Programmes:** Combine financial and digital literacy education for parents, including online safety training, economic support, and livelihood programmes—all linked to child protection education and compliance with RA 11930.

Recommendations for further research

- **Understanding gender differences:** Examine how boys and girls experience and respond to OSEC to develop tailored interventions.
- **Barriers to reporting:** Study why children and families hesitate to report OSEC and identify strategies to overcome these barriers.
- **Effectiveness of current interventions:** Evaluate existing programmes addressing OSEC to determine their impact and areas for improvement.

Any Questions?

Contact us!

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