



NETCLEAN REPORT

COVID-19 IMPACT 2020

A REPORT ABOUT
CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE CRIME

INTRODUCTION

INTRODUCTION	page 4
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	page 6
ABOUT THE REPORT	page 8

RESULTS

NINE INSIGHTS INTO CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE CRIME	page 10
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LAW ENFORCEMENT SURVEY	
COVID-19 IMPACT ON CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE CRIME	page 12
1. Restrictions have affected child sexual abuse crime	page 16
2. Online child sexual abuse activity has increased	page 22
3. Moderate increase in cybertips and online reports	page 25
4. Moderate increase in actual investigations and cases	page 30
5. COVID-19 has affected the capacity to investigate child sexual abuse crimes	page 40
6. Future consequences on child sexual abuse crime	page 48

BUSINESS INSIGHT	
DRIVERS FOR ADDRESSING CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE MATERIAL IN A CORPORATE ENVIRONMENT	
7. Ethics and the safeguarding of children	page 52
8. Many stakeholders, many drivers	page 54
9. COVID-19 has increased remote working	page 56

IN CLOSING

CONCLUSION	page 70
THE NETCLEAN REPORTS 2015–2019	page 72
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	page 74

INTRODUCTION

THE PANDEMIC HAS PUT CHILDREN AT INCREASED RISK

Anna Borgström, CEO, NetClean

I am pleased to introduce the NetClean Report – COVID-19 Impact 2020. This is our sixth consecutive report since we first started producing the reports in 2015. What started then as a basic survey and overview of child sexual abuse (CSA) crime, has grown into a larger and much more ambitious project.

The NetClean Report is now an important part of our ambition to add to the globally growing knowledge bank about CSA crime, which is used to create awareness and discourse about this world-wide problem. The previous NetClean Reports have reached a global audience from a wide range of industries, and have been read by policy makers, advocacy leaders, business leaders, law enforcement professionals and researchers. In the current time of a global pandemic, this latest research is more urgent than ever.

As we begin 2021, we know that the impact of what happened last year, the start of the COVID-19 pandemic and the fallout from that, will continue to affect us for years to come.

In the spring of 2020, we saw early indications that many of the measures, e.g. lockdowns and social restrictions, were increasing the risk that children – those in already vulnerable situations, but also more children in general – would suffer sexual abuse.

This is why this year's NetClean Report focuses on the fallout from COVID-19. The results, based on a survey conducted with law enforcement professionals working across the globe on this issue, showed that the early indications were correct – the pandemic has created an environment with increased risks for children and affected law enforcement capacity to investigate CSA crimes. This survey is presented in the first part of this report.

As in previous years, we have also included a 'business insights' section in the report. NetClean works exclusively with employers and workplaces and is therefore well placed to provide unique insight into how this important sector is addressing child sexual abuse material (CSAM) and taking responsibility for their IT environments.

This year we asked businesses to describe the drivers behind their decision to stop CSAM from appearing in their IT environments. We also looked into how COVID-19 has affected the way that people work in these organisations, and the associated issues that come with a workforce suddenly working remotely.

The NetClean Report – COVID-19 Impact 2020 highlights how vulnerable children have been made even more vulnerable because of the pandemic, as many safeguards have been removed from their lives.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The first part of the NetClean Report – COVID-19 Impact 2020 looks at how the COVID-19 pandemic has affected child sexual abuse (CSA) crime. Section two of the report looks at why businesses and organisations choose to address child sexual abuse material (CSAM) in corporate environments.

KEY FINDINGS FROM THE LAW ENFORCEMENT SURVEY

We surveyed 470 law enforcement officers from 39 countries who work on cases pertaining to CSA crime. Three countries had large enough samples to allow the data to be considered individually; the United States, Sweden and the United Kingdom. It was also possible to consider the data from Europe as a standout sample.

Difference between countries

Generally, with some exceptions, respondents from the UK and the European sample matched the results provided by the whole sample of 470 law enforcement professionals. The US respondents generally reported bigger effects on CSA crime as a result of the pandemic, whereas the Swedish respondents generally reported smaller effects.

Restrictions have affected CSA crime

The result shows that the fallout from the pandemic has clearly affected online CSA crime and has had an impact on offline CSA crime. The surveyed police officers reported that lockdowns, social restrictions and school closures led to both adults and children spending more time online, therefore increasing the risk of online CSA crime. Confinement to the home meant that children may have been isolated with their abuser. During school closures, children did not have access to mandatory reporters, which according to the respondents affected the number of reports of offline CSA crime.

Online CSA activity and online reporting has increased

Law enforcement reported an increase in online activity, primarily in attempts to contact children, in volumes of voluntarily self-produced CSAM, and in peer-to-peer downloads. They also reported an increase in activity on the darknet. Respondents also reported a moderate increase in cybertips and online reports during the first eight months of the pandemic.

Moderate increase in actual CSA investigations

Half of the respondents reported an increase in possession, receipt and distribution cases, and also in online CSA cases, such as grooming and sexual extortion. Just over a quarter of the respondents reported an increase in physical CSA cases. Of those who reported an increase, the majority reported a moderate increase.

COVID-19 has had an effect on the capacity to investigate CSA crimes

More than half of the respondents reported that the fallout from the pandemic affected law enforcement capacity to investigate CSA crime. They reported that an increase in workload, limitations associated with working from home, suspended search warrants, difficulties in conducting interviews and limited court processes led to slower processing time or cases not being investigated at all. However, more than four in ten respondents reported no effects on law enforcement capacity as a result of the pandemic.

First insight

The report provides a first insight into how the pandemic has affected CSA crime; however it will be a number of years until we know the full impact of COVID-19 in relation to this crime. This is reflected in the relatively large share of respondents who answered “Don't know” throughout the report.

KEY FINDINGS FROM THE BUSINESS INTERVIEWS

To identify the drivers for addressing CSAM in corporate environments, interviews were conducted with sixteen employees from sixteen businesses and organisations, who work in the areas of: Sustainability, Ethics & Compliance, IT Security, Human Resources and Legal. The sixteen businesses and organisations are from a wide range of different industries, of different sizes, and from both the private and public sector.

Ethics as the primary driver

Addressing CSAM in a business environment can be a complex issue as the initiative needs the buy-in from many different stakeholders who will have different reasons, drivers, for engaging in this work. However, throughout the interviews we realised that the companies' core drive is to act as ethical entities, and this was furthered by their statements that they consider the drive to protect and safeguard children the most crucial reason for installing software to identify CSAM on IT equipment.

Many stakeholders, many drivers

Other drivers for addressing CSAM in corporate environments ranged from sustainability and Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) frameworks, policy compliance and risk assessments from a compliance perspective, to IT security risks, brand protection and Human Resources (HR) drivers; ensuring that employees share the company's core values, and that they don't engage in criminal behaviour.

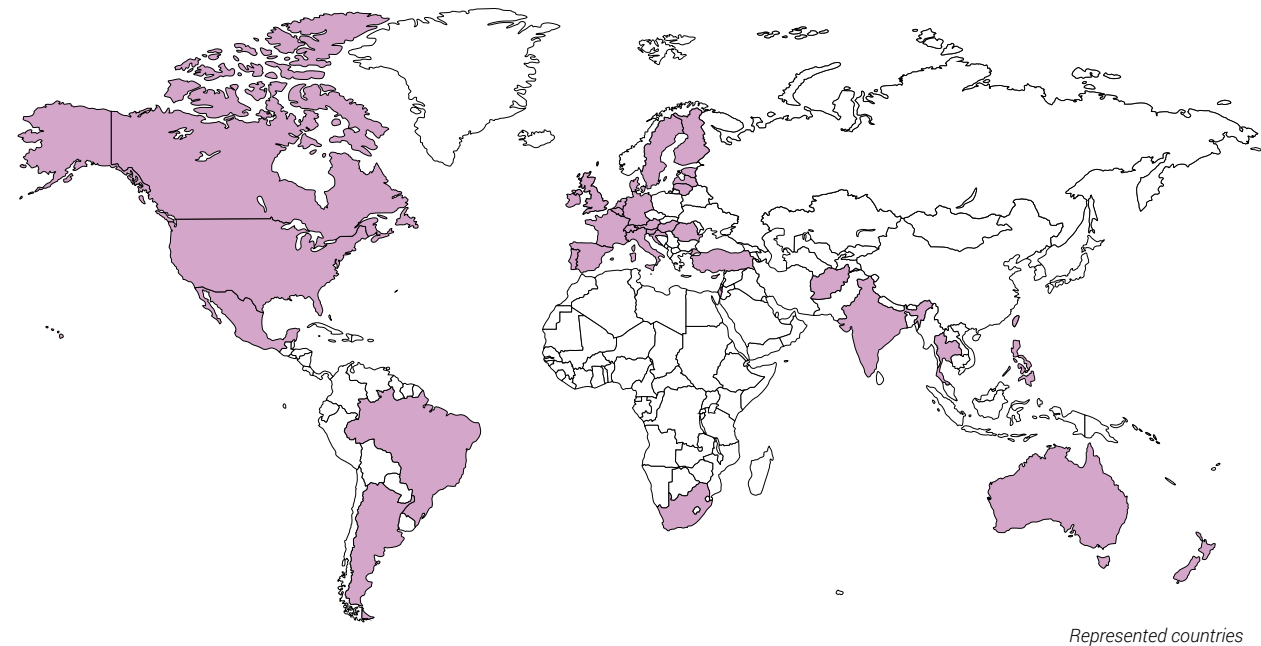
CONCLUSION

It is too early to draw any major conclusions from the results presented in this report, however we must pay attention to signs and trends that we see forming. The results indicate that school closures and other lockdown measures have been detrimental to already vulnerable children, but also to children in general. Therefore it is important that policy makers consider these findings when considering future crises measures. The insights into this unprecedented situation also provides NetClean, and our core clientele (businesses and large organisations), with more impetus to not only take steps to protect IT environments, but also to talk about why. If we understand CSA crime, we will understand how to react, and how to quickly galvanise measures to combat it.

For more information about our knowledge building work, please read our reports and follow our work by reading our blog, social media channels, and website www.netclean.com.

ABOUT THE NETCLEAN REPORT

The NetClean Report – COVID-19 Impact 2020 is the sixth report in the NetClean Report series. The aim of these reports is to promote greater awareness of and more insight into child sexual abuse crime; to contribute to effective ways of stopping the dissemination of child sexual abuse material; and, ultimately, to stop the sexual abuse of children. The data in this report is the result of two different enquiries.



LAW ENFORCEMENT SURVEY – COVID-19 IMPACT ON CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE CRIME

The law enforcement survey in this report looks at the effects on child sexual abuse crime following the COVID-19 pandemic during 2020. The data was collected from police officers across the globe who work on cases pertaining to child sexual abuse crime.

The survey

The enquiry was undertaken between 12 June and 17 October 2020. 470 police officers from 39 countries participated in this year's survey,

by filling out an online survey anonymously. As always, we asked the respondents to comment on the findings, and their thoughts and observations are included in this report.

47 percent of the respondents were from North America and 44 percent came from Europe. The rest were from Oceania (3 %), Asia (3 %), South America (2 %), Africa (0.5 %) and representatives from international organisations such as INTERPOL and Europol made up (0.5 %).

Respondents were approached through two different methods:

1. NetClean's sister company Griffeye distributed the survey to users of Griffeye Analyze; a software platform used by law enforcement professionals to analyse large volumes of images and videos in child sexual abuse investigations.
2. The survey was circulated in the law enforcement community with the help of a number of law enforcement agencies.

Represented countries

Afghanistan, Argentina, Australia, Austria, Belgium, Brazil, Canada, The Cayman Islands, Croatia, Cyprus, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Hungary, India, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Mexico, The Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Philippines, Portugal, Romania, Slovenia, South Africa, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Taiwan, Thailand, Turkey, The United Kingdom, The United States, and International organisations (e.g. INTERPOL or Europol).

Breakout of countries

Three countries had large enough samples to allow the data to be considered individually; the United States, Sweden and the United Kingdom. It was also possible to consider the data from Europe individually. Because of these response rates, Sweden and the United Kingdom are represented as separate entities, and not included in the European sample.

United States	44 %
Sweden	15 %
United Kingdom	12 %
Europe	17 %

The fact that the United States, Sweden and the United Kingdom deployed different strategies to tackle the COVID-19 pandemic, also makes it pertinent to look at the results separately. Especially Sweden stands out as it had recommendations for social distancing, but never put in place the lockdowns and school closures that many other countries did.

BUSINESS INSIGHT – DRIVERS FOR ADDRESSING CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE MATERIAL IN A CORPORATE ENVIRONMENT

Part two of the report provides insight into why companies decide to take a stand and prevent child sexual abuse material in their corporate environment.

Sixteen organisations

Qualitative interviews were conducted with sixteen individuals from sixteen different companies and organisations. All organisations had previously identified the risks associated with child sexual abuse material being consumed, downloaded or distributed within the company network or on company devices. The respondents were selected from five different areas: Sustainability (3), Ethics & Compliance (4), IT Security (3), HR (3) and Legal (3).

The interviews were conducted between June–September 2020. All respondents were asked the same questions, and each interview took between 30–60 minutes.

Wide range of industries

The selected businesses and organisations are from a wide range of different industries, of different sizes, and from both the private and public sector. Companies that operate on an international market and on a one-country market were both represented. The majority of the companies have Swedish head quarters.

Insight into drivers

The insights and views collected from the interviews are presented as a merged point of view. The objective was not to present a statistical overview of what the respondents said, but instead give insight into the drivers behind taking action on the issue of child sexual abuse material in a corporate environment. Individuals, organisations and industries have been anonymised in the report.

INTERVIEWS IN THE REPORT:

To contextualise the results of the study, we have conducted interviews with a number of distinguished experts in this field, listed here in the order in which they appear in this report:

Anna Borgström
Chief Executive Officer, NetClean

Cathal Delaney
Head of Team, Analysis Project Twins, EC3, Europol

John Shehan
Vice President, Exploited Children Division, National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC), USA

John Pizzuro
NJ ICAC Commander, New Jersey State Police, USA

Patrick Cordner
Head of Swedish Cybercrime Center (SC3), National Operative Department, Sweden

Rob Jones
Director Threat Leadership, National Crime Agency, UK

Simon Bailey
Chief Constable, Norfolk Constabulary, National Police Chiefs' Council Lead on Child Protection, UK

Uri Sadeh
Adv. MSc. Coordinator of the Crimes against Children Unit, INTERPOL

Elaine Weidman Grunewald
Global Sustainability Executive, and Founder, AI Sustainability Center

NINE INSIGHTS INTO CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE CRIME

LAW ENFORCEMENT SURVEY – COVID-19 IMPACT ON CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE CRIME

1

RESTRICTIONS HAVE AFFECTED CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE CRIME

- / Clear effect on *online* child sexual abuse crime, some effect on *offline* child sexual abuse crime.
- / Lockdowns and social restrictions have led to adults and children spending more time online, increasing the risk of online child sexual abuse crime.
- / Confinement to the home and no access to mandatory reporters have affected the number of reports of offline child sexual abuse crime.
- / Reports of the effect on child sexual abuse crime vary between different countries.

2

ONLINE CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE ACTIVITY HAS INCREASED

- / Law enforcement has noticed an increase in attempts to contact children, volumes of voluntarily self-produced CSAM, and in peer-to-peer downloads.
- / There has been an increase in activity on the darknet and some police officers report a change in the nature of posts on darknet boards.
- / Reports of the effect on online child sexual abuse activity vary between different countries.
- / Police officers report an increase in the number of offenders and an increase in activity in already existing offender communities.

3

MODERATE INCREASE IN CYBERTIPS AND ONLINE REPORTS

- / Almost half of the respondents report an increase in referrals from NCMEC during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- / A quarter of respondents report unchanged numbers of reports.
- / The US reports higher numbers of NCMEC referrals than the UK, Sweden and Europe.
- / Isolation and more time online are believed to have affected reporting.

4

MODERATE INCREASE IN ACTUAL INVESTIGATIONS AND CASES

- / Half of the respondents report an increase in possession, receipt and distribution cases, and in online child sexual abuse cases, such as grooming and sexual extortion.
- / Just over a quarter of respondents report an increase in physical child sexual abuse cases.
- / The US reports the highest increase in cases, Sweden reports the lowest.
- / Some police officers report changes in the nature of possession, receipt and distribution cases, as well as grooming and sexual extortion cases.

5

COVID-19 HAS AFFECTED THE CAPACITY TO INVESTIGATE CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE CRIMES

- / More than half of the respondents report that the fallout from the pandemic has affected law enforcement capacity to investigate child sexual abuse crime.
- / Nearly half of the respondents report that warrants and court cases have been affected by the pandemic.
- / The prioritisation of child sexual abuse cases has been largely unaffected by the pandemic, however some respondents report reprioritisations.
- / US respondents generally report a bigger effect on law enforcement capacity, whereas Swedish respondents report largely unaffected law enforcement capacity.

6

FUTURE CONSEQUENCES ON CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE CRIME

- / Risk of delayed reporting.
- / Risk of increase in hands-on child sexual abuse.
- / Risk of law enforcement and courts being affected by backlogs and lack of resources.

BUSINESS INSIGHT – DRIVERS FOR ADDRESSING CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE MATERIAL IN A CORPORATE ENVIRONMENT

7

ETHICS AND THE SAFEGUARDING OF CHILDREN

8

MANY STAKEHOLDERS, MANY DRIVERS

9

COVID-19 HAS INCREASED REMOTE WORKING

COVID-19 IMPACT ON CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE CRIME

INSIGHTS

- 1. Restrictions have affected child sexual abuse crime
- 2. Online child sexual abuse activity has increased
- 3. Moderate increase in cybertips and online reports
- 4. Moderate increase in actual investigations and cases
- 5. COVID-19 has affected the capacity to investigate child sexual abuse crimes
- 6. Future consequences on child sexual abuse crime

Presentation of results
– Breakout of different samples

The law enforcement section of the report is based on a survey with police officers across the globe who work on cases pertaining to child sexual abuse crime. 470 police officers from 39 countries answered this year’s survey.

Three countries had large enough samples to allow the data to be considered individually: the United States, Sweden and the United Kingdom. It was also possible to consider the data from Europe individually. Because of these response rates, Sweden and the United Kingdom are represented as separate entities, and not included in the European sample.

Breakout of numbers are presented for those insights where there is a relevant difference between respondents.

More information about the survey is available in the section “About the report”.

Law enforcement professionals answered the survey anonymously, providing invaluable information and better understanding of this global problem. We would like to direct a big thank you to all of those who took the time to complete the survey.

United States	44 %
Sweden	15 %
United Kingdom	12 %
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THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

The COVID-19 pandemic is, at the point of writing, an ongoing pandemic, which has deeply affected the entire world. First identified in Wuhan, China, in December 2019, it was declared a pandemic in March 2020. In November 2020 more than 54 million cases had been confirmed, with more than 1.3 million deaths attributed to COVID-19. The pandemic deeply affected the world in 2020, and will continue to do so into 2021.

In a statement in October 2020, the WHO stated that the COVID-19 pandemic has presented an 'unprecedented challenge to public health, food systems and the world of work. The economic and social disruption caused by the pandemic is devastating: tens of millions of people are at risk of falling into extreme poverty, while the number of undernourished people, currently estimated at nearly 690 million, could increase by up to 132 million by the end of the year. Millions of enterprises face an existential threat. Nearly half of the world's 3.3 billion global workforce are at risk of losing their livelihoods*.

Responses from governments across the world have varied, but have included longer or shorter periods

of national or regional containment measures such as quarantines, curfews and lockdowns. In April, more than half of the world's population were under some form of lockdown. Travel and free movement across the world was affected and sometimes restricted. The pandemic also affected the educational systems globally, with a large number of governments closing schools for longer or shorter periods of time, turning to online education.

The Swedish Government's response to the pandemic differed from most other European countries in that Sweden mostly remained open during 2020. Although recommendations for social distancing and no travel was strongly advised, there were no

lockdowns and schools for children up to the age of fifteen remained open.

COVID-19 and child sexual abuse crime

Early on there was concern that the fallout from the pandemic, with its social restrictions and lockdowns, would affect child sexual abuse (CSA) crime in a number of ways. Speaking to the law enforcement community we saw signs that law enforcement capacity to investigate CSA crimes might also have been affected.

A summary of some of the reports and warnings is included under the heading 'COVID-19 - Published reports on impact on child sexual abuse crime'.

COVID-19 – PUBLISHED REPORTS ON IMPACTS ON CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE CRIME

Throughout the year several reports have been published on the increased risk of child sexual exploitation due to circumstances created by the COVID-19 pandemic. This is a short overview of some of the reports and warnings.

Early warnings

The first warnings were published as early as March, by the FBI¹, IWF² and UNICEF³, to name a few, when countries started to impose restrictions, and schools and workplaces were shut down. At this point concerns were voiced that isolation and homeschooling would increase the time that children spent on the internet, and lead to an increased risk of grooming, as well as sexual coercion and extortion.

Offenders exploiting the COVID-19 pandemic online

NGOs and law enforcement, among them Europol⁴ and INTERPOL⁵, have since then reported an increase in activity relating to child sexual abuse (CSA) on both the open web and darknet.

They have also reported an increase in activity and sharing of material on the darknet, and that conversations about how to exploit the fallout of the pandemic have surfaced

on dedicated child sexual exploitation boards. More time online has allowed perpetrators to build new forums and to continue developing organised business models for sharing child sexual abuse material (CSAM) online.

There are predictions that live-streaming will increase as a consequence of travel restrictions, moving travelling sex offenders online.

More unsupervised time online

A frequent concern in many of the reports and articles that have been published this year, is the increased risk of sexual exploitation when children are made to stay at home from both schools and social activities. With this comes more time spent on the internet, often unsupervised, and often from an earlier age.

Another concern that has been brought forward by, amongst others, INTERPOL and NSPCC⁶ is that in periods of lockdown, children are removed from a safety net of teachers, coaches and other adults who are able to help them by noticing and reporting suspicions of abuse.

EUROPOL EXPLOITING ISOLATION: OFFENDERS AND VICTIMS OF ONLINE CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Some of the key findings:

- Significant increases in activity relating to CSA on both the surface web and dark web during the COVID-19 lockdown period.
- Increased number of reports from the public to law enforcement or other institutions.
- Increased activity on peer-to-peer networks.
- Travel restrictions have shifted travelling sex offenders to sharing CSAM online.
- Consistent levels of activity by offenders on the dark web during lockdown reflects the ongoing organised business model that has evolved.

Released June 2020

INTERPOL THREATS AND TRENDS CHILD SEXUAL EXPLOITATION AND ABUSE – COVID-19 IMPACT

Some of the key findings:

- A reduction or delay in reporting of CSA offences as normal reporting channels are affected.
- A reduction in the use of the INTERPOL ICSE database by member countries.
- Delays or closures in courts leading to delays in processing cases.
- An increase in online CSA activity on both the darknet and open web, but there is no information at this stage to indicate an increase in new CSAM in circulation.
- A significant increase in the sharing of CSAM through the use of peer-to-peer networks.
- An increase in self-generated material distributed on the open web.

Released September 2020

* World Health Organization (2020). Impact of COVID-19 on people's livelihoods, their health and our food systems. Joint statement by ILO, FAO, IFAD and WHO. October 13.

¹ FBI National Press Office (2020). School Closings Due to COVID-19 Present Potential for Increased Risk of Child Exploitation. FBI Press Releases. March 23.

² Internet Watch Foundation (2020). Children may be at greater risk of grooming during coronavirus pandemic as IWF braces for spike in public reports. IWF Media Centre. March 21.

³ UNICEF (2020). COVID-19: Children at heightened risk of abuse, neglect, exploitation and violence amidst intensifying containment measures. UNICEF Press Releases. March 20.

⁴ Europol (2020). Exploiting isolation: offenders and victims of online child sexual abuse during the COVID-19 pandemic.

⁵ INTERPOL (2020). Child Sexual Exploitation and Abuse threats and trends.

⁶ Eleni Romanou and Emma Belton (2020). Isolated and struggling: social isolation and the risk of child maltreatment, in lockdown and beyond. London: NSPCC.

1 RESTRICTIONS HAVE AFFECTED CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE CRIME

- / Clear effect on *online* child sexual abuse crime, some effect on *offline* child sexual abuse crime.
- / Lockdowns and social restrictions have led to adults and children spending more time online, increasing the risk of online child sexual abuse crime.
- / Confinement to the home and no access to mandatory reporters have affected the number of reports of offline child sexual abuse crime.
- / Reports of the effect on child sexual abuse crime vary between different countries.

Effects on CSA crime

A clear majority, nearly two thirds, of respondents reported that the fallout from the COVID-19 pandemic, with its social restrictions and lockdowns, has affected online child sexual abuse (CSA) crime.

Many respondents, four in ten, also reported an effect on offline CSA crime. However, for offline CSA crime half of the respondents answered that they don't know, which makes this result less clear.

Indication of effects

The results in this report are an indication, and a first insight into how the fallout from the COVID-19 pandemic has affected CSA crime.

We don't yet know the full impact of the pandemic on CSA crime, and this is shown by the high number of respondents (often between a quarter or half of the respondents) who answered "Don't know" or "Unable to respond" throughout the report. There are several factors that could explain this; one being that we, at the point of writing, are still in the middle of the pandemic. Another is that reports of sexual crimes against children take time to reach law enforcement.

Just months after the start of the pandemic, it might be too early to see the definite effects of it.

However, whereas this might make it more difficult to draw definite conclusions from the results, the equally large share of respondents who reported seeing an impact gives a clear indication that the fallout from the COVID-19 pandemic has affected CSA crime and investigations.

Difference between countries

Countries/regions showed a difference in the number of police officers who reported an effect on CSA crime as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. The UK respondents and the European sample answered almost identically to the whole sample. Europe was slightly lower for online CSA crime; 55 percent reported a change.

A breakout of the US and Swedish samples shows that the US respondents had seen more changes than the other groups, for both online and offline CSA crime, whereas the same numbers for Swedish respondents were down. Important to note is that the number of respondents who answered that they had not seen a change is similar across all samples.

The Swedish respondents answered "don't know" to a higher degree than those from the other samples.

Increase in online CSA

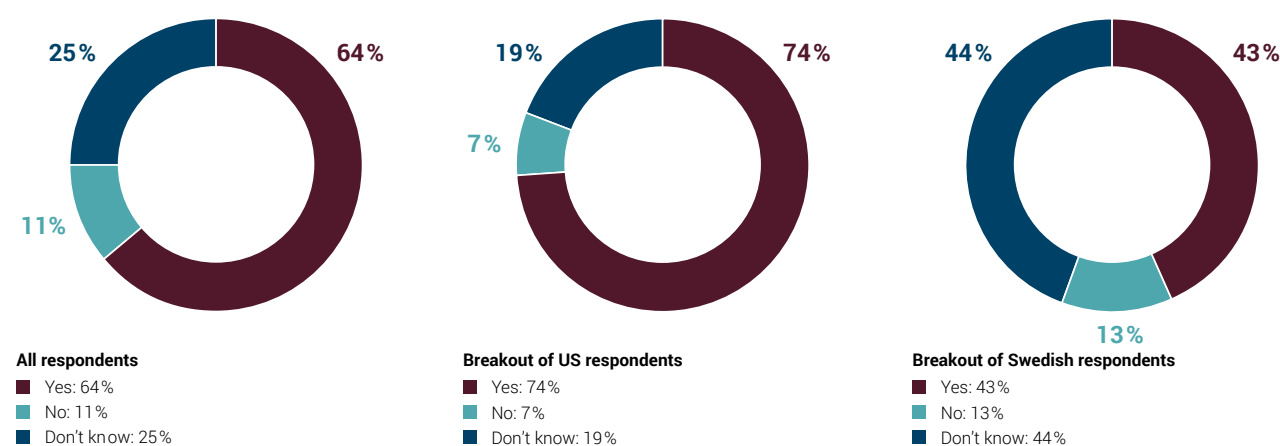
When asked to specify what types of changes they had seen, the overwhelming majority of respondents, more than nine in ten, reported an increase in CSA crime*. Of those, as many as seven in ten reported an increase in online CSA crime, including answers that specified online grooming, sexual extortion, self-produced material and livestreaming.

"Online: More children have been groomed online, more self-generated CSAM has been produced."

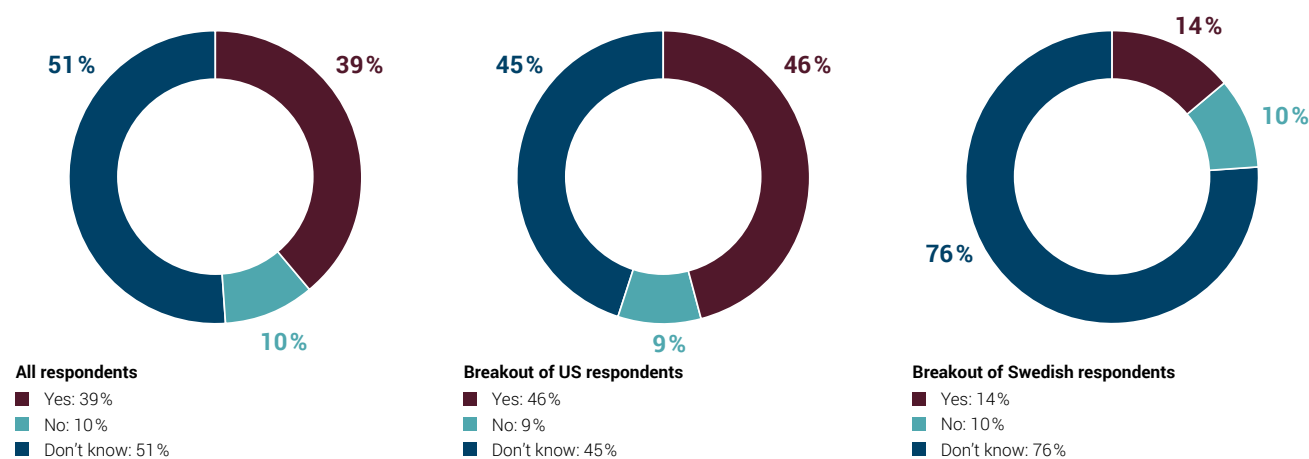
"The number of cases that our team has received this year has effectively doubled compared to the previous year. I believe that increased time at home has also increased the amount of time that offenders and potential child victims spend online; therefore, increasing the number of online child sexual abuse crimes."

"Increase in reported child exploitation material possession and distribution. Increase in reported contact child abuse."

WHETHER THE FALLOUT FROM THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC, SOCIAL RESTRICTIONS AND LOCKDOWNS, HAS HAD AN EFFECT ON ONLINE CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE CRIME.



WHETHER THE FALLOUT FROM THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC, SOCIAL RESTRICTIONS AND LOCKDOWNS, HAS HAD AN EFFECT ON OFFLINE CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE CRIME.



* See graph on page 19

1 RESTRICTIONS HAVE AFFECTED CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE CRIME

>> Less clear about offline CSA

One in ten police officers reported an increase in offline CSA crime. Another one in ten said that they expect an increase in offline crime that has not yet come through in police reports. A reported decrease in the number of reports of offline CSA crime during the pandemic seems to echo this assumption.

“Online child sexual abuse crime has risen whilst offline can be assumed to have increased also, but reporting of offline abuse has seen a small decrease.”

“Offenders have more access to children. Less reporting as children are kept out of social situations like schools where child sexual abuse is often identified and reported.”

“Child sexual abuse crimes appear to have increased, both online and offline. Everyone is stuck at home, spending more time online, leading to more online CSA crime. Children are also stuck at home, some of whom are in vulnerable situations, leading to more offline CSA crime.”

Increase in NCMEC reports

More than one in ten police officers specified an increase in NCMEC* referrals. Nearly all of those respondents were from the US. NCMEC reports are further examined in Insight 3.

“Significant increase in CyberTipline Reports received from NCMEC. A lot of the reports have been self-exploitation.”

“The NCMEC referrals went up significantly.”

More time online

More than half of the respondents specified different aspects of lockdowns and social restrictions that have affected CSA crime. Many specifically mentioned the effect that school closures have had. More than one third highlighted more time spent at home. Many specified both more adults and children spending more time online, and that children have often spent more unsupervised time online.

“Adults and children are spending more time online, therefore increasing the risks of online exploitation and abuse.”

“We are seeing an increase in reports of online child sexual abuse crime. Due to quarantine and school moving online, children have more time to utilise their devices in an unsupervised atmosphere.”

“The combined effect of increased online activity of child sex offenders with increased online activity by children = perfect storm.”

Isolated with abuser

In addition to children spending more time online, nearly one in five police officers said that lockdowns and school closures have had an effect on offline CSA crime, as children in destructive environments have been in isolation with their offenders. Simultaneously, the access to safe adults and mandatory reporters at schools has been cut off, leaving children even more exposed.

“As for offline, many had to isolate, and so often children had to be isolated with their abusers.”

“Children no longer have a safe haven of leaving an abusive environment if that is what their home situation is, and children are spending much more time online and most times unsupervised which increases the amount of online crimes.”

“Offline: children staying at home, being more exposed to sexual abuse in the circle of trust. Less detection of the cases by frontline professionals (teachers, social workers, etc.).”

“Hands on offences are being under-reported due to lack of interaction with mandated reporters.”

* NCMEC, The National Center for Missing & Exploited Children, is a private, non-profit corporation in the US. NCMEC operates the CyberTipline, a national mechanism that the public, and electronic service providers use to report instances of suspected child sexual exploitation. These reports are made available to appropriate law enforcement agencies, both nationally and internationally, for review and potential investigation.

Decrease in CSA crime

Previously, a decrease in reports of offline CSA crime was mentioned. Whereas those respondents had seen a decrease in reports, a limited number of respondents also mentioned the possibility of an actual decrease in offline CSA crime.

“Online increased, while offline decreased.”

“Offline because predators do not have as much access as they would when everything is open.”

“Physical contact will have fallen due to government restrictions.”

Other respondents highlighted that offenders in the close family setting have had more access to their victims during the pandemic, whereas

physical offenders outside of that setting would likely have had less access to their victims.

“Statistics show that both are up. It makes sense that more people are online during this time and familial offenders have more access to their victims. It would also make sense that non-familial offenders would likely have less access to victims.”

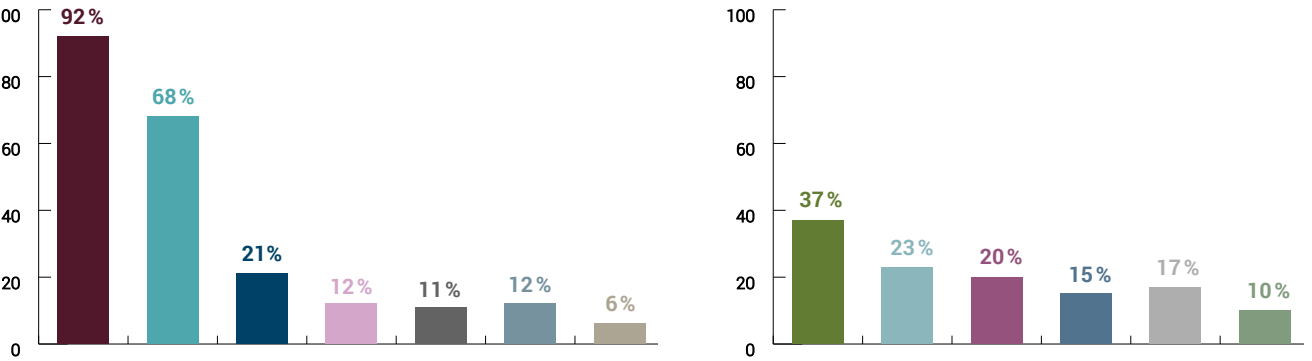
“Concerning online CSA crime more offenders have been active online because they had more time. Concerning offline CSA crime it is too early to tell. In some cases there has been a decrease because the offender no longer had access to the victim. But in some case the offender was in lockdown with the victim so the abuse could have increased.”

Too early to know

A number of respondents said that it is still too early to know the effects of the pandemic.

“We all assume that there must be correlations with increased domestic abuse and more vulnerabilities to online grooming due to increased unmonitored screen time, but there is little solid data as yet to confirm this. Most information is anecdotal. Some observe increased reporting, others decreased reporting, etc. there is little exploitation currently in tourism, due to travel restrictions which also suggests increased offender activity online, which has been carefully confirmed by law enforcement, yet little data has been provided to confirm a bigger trend in this regard.”

CHANGES THAT SURVEYED LAW ENFORCEMENT OFFICERS REPORTED SEEING AS A RESULT OF COVID-19.



The chart shows the most reported changes seen by respondents who provided more detail in open text. The respondents represent those who explicitly mentioned the above changes.

- An increase in CSA crime 92%
- Increase in online CSA crime 68%
- Increase in incoming cases and investigations 21%
- Increase in NCMEC reports 12%
- Increase in offline CSA crime 11%
- An expected increase in offline CSA crime 12%
- Decrease in reports of offline CSA crime 6%
- More time spent at home 37%
- More adults spending more time online 23%
- More children online, and children spending more unsupervised time online 20%
- Effects of school closures 15%
- Children isolated with their offenders 17%
- Children and mandatory reporters unable to report 10%

CATHAL DELANEY

Head of Team, Analysis Project Twins, EC3, Europol

AN ONGOING VOLATILE SITUATION THAT IS DIFFICULT TO READ

We have had a number of concerns during this pandemic, but we won't know the outcome of these until sometime in the future. There is a potential increase in victimisation, both online and offline. Without access to normal support mechanisms, such as adults at schools, child victims risk being deprived of the ability to report. Therefore, when restrictions ease there might be an increase in reports.

We have an ongoing volatile situation, with national and local lockdowns, and different restrictions, which makes the situation very difficult to read, and I think it is too early to see the long-term effects of this pandemic.

Online activity

The data that we have from different organisations and member states shows a clear increase in offender activity in seeking child sexual abuse material (CSAM) online. It's been seen in peer-to-peer activity, the number of blocked websites known to contain CSAM, the volumes of cyber tips, and reports to hotlines.

The darknet

We have also seen activity on the darknet, and early on during the pandemic there was talk on darknet forums that the pandemic was providing more opportunities to groom children. We've also seen an increase on the darknet in the sharing of "capping", which is livestreamed videos captured with or without the knowledge of the child. The level of activity among offenders on the darknet has otherwise remained the same during the pandemic, illustrating their resilience even during increased restrictions on private time.

New material

If more new CSAM has been produced during the pandemic, we are unlikely to

see it for some time. In the darknet communities, new material is connected to status and usually only shared among closed groups. Circulation to a wider community usually happens at a later stage.

Possible explanations

There are a number of possible explanations to why the COVID-19 pandemic might have increased the risk of child sexual exploitation (CSE). The most significant factor is the additional time that both adults and children have spent online during the pandemic, and the potential lack of supervision of children online. Simultaneously children have been left without their usual support mechanisms.

When it comes to physical abuse, CSE forms part of the body of domestic violence, and with reports of domestic violence increasing in the wake of COVID-19, this could also affect CSE. Another observation is that the patterns of activity on peer-to-peer are similar to those of holiday periods, when families are staying together for an extended period of time, and there are fewer things to do and fewer places to go.

Law enforcement capacity

The pandemic meant that Europol quickly had to adapt and prioritise its resources, but we've continued to

support our member countries throughout this period. We have not been able to support on site, which is something that we would normally do, but operations and arrests have still been successfully carried out.

Early in the pandemic we saw a change in reports generated by NCMEC. Normally we can differentiate between reports generated by moderators and automatic detection, but with this situation it was not always the case. It was clear that service providers had in many cases sent staff home, and so there was less moderated material than before. That meant that knowing with certainty which reports law enforcement could or could not act upon was more difficult than usual.

Too early to tell

We can never tell how much CSAM exists online. Therefore it may be years before we really know the effects of the pandemic. It is still too early to know whether the increases are an effect of COVID-19 or not; research will have to establish that at a later stage. What we do know is that some countries report a drop in hands-on child sexual abuse reports, which indicates underreporting. The likelihood is, that even if there is a drop, children are still being abused and material created.

“
We can never tell
how much CSAM exists
online. Therefore it may
be years before we really
know the effects of
the pandemic.
”

2 ONLINE CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE ACTIVITY HAS INCREASED

- / Law enforcement has noticed an increase in attempts to contact children, volumes of voluntarily self-produced CSAM, and in peer-to-peer downloads.
- / There has been an increase in activity on the darknet and some police officers report a change in the nature of posts on darknet boards.
- / Reports of the effect on online child sexual abuse activity vary between different countries.
- / Police officers report an increase in the number of offenders and an increase in activity in already existing offender communities.

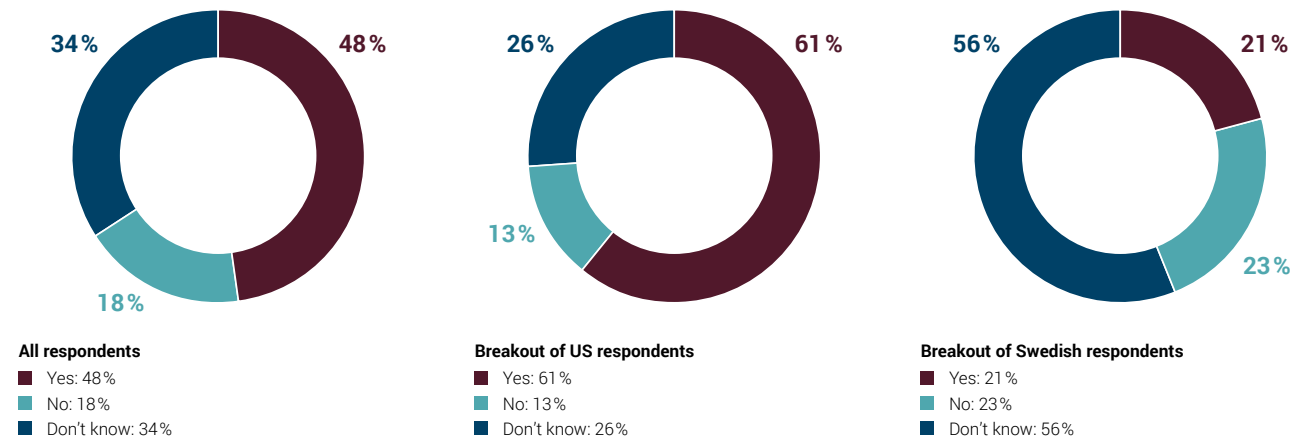
Online activity, such as downloads of child sexual abuse material (CSAM) on peer-to-peer (P2P) networks, activity on the darknet, and activity by offenders on social media platforms, is monitored by law enforcement and used to provide intelligence. This information gives an indication of how active child sexual abuse (CSA) offenders have been during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The information presented in this chapter is closely connected to online reporting and cybertips (covered in Insight 3), which means a certain overlap between the two.

Difference between countries
Nearly half of the respondents reported a change in online activity during the COVID-19 period. As with the previous insight, answers differed depending on countries/regions. The European sample showed numbers similar to the whole, 46 percent, whereas the UK was slightly lower with 37 percent. A bigger share, six in ten, of the US respondents reported a change in online activity, whereas this number was much lower for the Swedish respondents, only two in ten.

Increase in all areas
Respondents who reported a change in online activity were also asked what changes they had seen. A majority of the respondents reported that they had seen an increase in attempts to contact children, in the volumes of self-produced material and in downloads of CSAM on P2P networks. An increase was also reported for activity on darknet forums and boards, livestreamed CSA and number of websites on the open web that contain CSAM.

WHETHER THERE HAS BEEN A CHANGE IN ONLINE ACTIVITY DURING THE COVID-19 PERIOD.



TYPES OF CHANGES TO ONLINE ACTIVITY.

	Considerable increase	Moderate increase	Unchanged	Moderate decrease	Considerable decrease	Don't know/ unable to answer
Attempts to contact children	39%	40%	7%	1%	1%	12%
Voluntarily self-produced material	27%	34%	8%	0%	1%	30%
Downloads of CSAM on P2P networks	19%	40%	9%	1%	2%	29%
Activity on darknet forums	17%	33%	6%	1%	0%	43%
Livestreamed CSA	16%	25%	11%	0%	0%	48%
Number of websites that contain CSAM on the open internet	12%	21%	16%	0%	1%	50%

Types of changes seen by the group of respondents who in the previous question reported seeing a change in online activity.

Attempts to contact children
Eight in ten police officers reported an increase (considerable or moderate) in perpetrators attempting to contact children online, whereas six in ten police officers reported an increase in self-produced CSAM.

“Our undercover teams monitoring teen chat forums have seen exponential increases in number of users on the boards and more aggressive solicitations for images from users.”

“More chat forum based activity and children posting self-generated IIOC* via mainstream social media.”

“Attempts to contact children through live streaming apps used for school.”

“Children seem more likely to self-victimise than they did before. Victimisation of younger children has increased due to issuing of Chromebooks [to younger children than before.]”

P2P networks
Six in ten police officers reported an increase in downloads of CSAM on P2P networks.

“Increase in CSAM through older P2P networks.”

Contrary to this, a few police officers commented that P2P activity had decreased during COVID-19.

“I believe the decrease was due to peer-to-peer users being quarantined with other people and not having their privacy to operate on peer-to-peer networks as usual.”

Darknet
Half of the respondents said that they had seen an increase in activity on darknet forums and CSAM boards.

“I have seen a significant increase in non-US based encrypted chat platforms as an alternative to TOR. I have also seen increased coordination and sharing of techniques amongst offenders. I have also noticed as offenders are home due to COVID, new relationships have been built across time zones as offenders that aren't normally online at the same time now have more time online. Increased alone time for offenders has increased their networking online.”

“Significant increase in traffic in the first month alone on the dark web, traffic was around 15–20% relating to forums and chats for child sexual exploitation.”

Nature of posts
More than one in ten police officers reported seeing a change in the nature of posts on CSAM boards on the darknet during the COVID-19 pandemic**. Almost the same number of respondents answered that they had not seen this change. Also relevant to note is that the large majority of respondents answered “don't know” to this question, which makes it difficult to draw any major conclusions.

When asked to elaborate on how the nature of posts had changed, the respondents primarily mentioned an increase in demand for newly produced CSAM, an increase in shared imagery, and discussions around how COVID-19 has increased opportunities for offenders to get access to children.

“At the onset of the pandemic there was increased discussion among offenders on how the COVID-19 pandemic may be an opportunity for them to offend with greater ease either in person or online (as more children were at home and online).”

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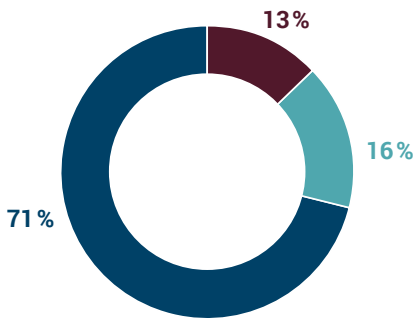
* Indecent images of children.
** See graph on page 24.

2 ONLINE CSA
ACTIVITY HAS
INCREASED

>> “ More self-produced content. I have also seen a significant uptick in hacked home security camera footage. On a certain non-US encrypted chat platform there are entire groups dedicated to the trading of hacked cameras, both CSAM and voyeur content.”

“ A lot of COVID specific comments and forums where child sexual offenders are discussing the opportunities lockdown presents as well as detailing their increased access to their children.”

WHETHER THE NATURE OF POSTS ON DARKNET BOARDS HAS CHANGED DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC.



■ Yes: 13 %
■ No: 16 %
■ Don't know: 71 %

Changes to darknet boards seen by the group of respondents who in the previous question reported seeing a change in online activity.

Many are uncertain

Around ten percent of respondents reported unchanged activity across different online activities. Hardly any police officers noted a decrease. Instead, most of the police officers who didn't note an increase, between 30–50 percent, answered that they don't know.

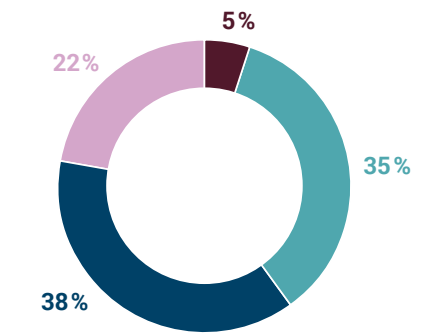
An increase in active individuals

Nearly half of the police officers who reported an increase in online activity, answered that they believed that individuals already active in downloading and sharing CSAM had become more active during the COVID-19 pandemic. Nearly two thirds of the police officers also reported that **more** individuals had become active in downloading and sharing CSAM during the pandemic.

“ Offenders' posting behaviour is impacted in different ways; new individuals (and infrequent users) have decided to join and participate on child sexual exploitation forums as they are working from home. Others have had to step away and/ or decreased their activity as their families are also home and in close proximity.”

“ This was an extremely intriguing question. Social isolation can have a significant effect on a person's mental/social well-being ... but whether this can lead to otherwise untapped predilections for child sexual abuse materials I'm not sure.”

WHETHER INCREASES IN ONLINE ACTIVITY IS A RESULT OF THE SAME INDIVIDUALS AS BEFORE BECOMING MORE ACTIVE, OR IF MORE INDIVIDUALS HAVE BECOME ACTIVE IN DOWNLOADING AND SHARING CSAM.



■ Same number of individuals are sharing material: 5 %
■ More individuals are active: 35 %
■ Both of the above (Individuals that are active before are sharing more material AND more individuals are active): 38 %
■ Don't know: 22 %

The chart shows the opinions of the group of respondents who reported seeing a change in online activity.

3 MODERATE INCREASE
IN CYBERTIPS AND
ONLINE REPORTS

- / Almost half of the respondents report an increase in referrals from NCMEC.
- / A quarter of respondents report unchanged numbers of reports.
- / The US reports higher numbers of NCMEC referrals than the UK, Sweden and Europe.
- / Isolation and more time online are believed to have affected reporting.

This section looks specifically at the number of reports and cybertips sent to law enforcement from NCMEC and hotlines, and reports about child sexual abuse material (CSAM) sent directly from the public.

Moderate increase

The overall results show that about 30–40 percent of the respondents have seen an increase in different types of cybertips and reports from NCMEC, hotlines and the public. Most have seen a moderate increase in reports, with slightly higher numbers for NCMEC reports.

“ We have had a 12 % increase in cybertips from NCMEC when data compared from March–August 2019 to March–August 2020.”

Between one fifth and one quarter of the respondents reported that the number of reports have remained unchanged during the pandemic. Very few police officers answered that they had seen a decrease in reports.

“ There is a regular increase in number of reports from one year to the next year, with a constant movement. We did not notice any specific evolution due to the COVID situation.”

Too early to know

Relevant to note is that, similar to the other questions in the report, about 30–40 percent of the respondents answered that they don't know. In the comments to the question, one in ten respondents also either said that it was too early to draw any conclusions, or that there was a delay in reporting to law enforcement.

“ Any changes haven't filtered through to us yet. We're anticipating a rise in offences but are still waiting for the referrals.”

“ The real effects will take time to filter through to us.”

CHANGES TO THE NUMBER OF CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE REPORTS DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC.

	Considerable increase	Moderate increase	Unchanged	Moderate decrease	Considerable decrease	Don't know/ unable to answer
Number of reports from NCMEC	24 %	19 %	20 %	3 %	2 %	32 %
Number of reports from hotlines and similar organisations	10 %	21 %	26 %	3 %	1 %	39 %
Number of reports of CSAM directly to law enforcement	10 %	22 %	26 %	2 %	1 %	39 %

3 MODERATE INCREASE
IN CYBERTIPS AND
ONLINE REPORTS

>> NCMEC reports

More than four in ten respondents reported an increase in NCMEC reports, which is higher than for other types of reports. One quarter of the respondents reported a considerable increase and one fifth had seen a moderate increase.

This was also reflected in Insight 1, where one in ten police officers specifically mentioned an increase in NCMEC reports as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

“ The cybertips I have received from NCMEC has increased four times my average.”

“ Just an increase in NCMEC referrals.”

Higher numbers in the US

A breakdown of numbers into countries/ regions shows a difference in reporting. More than half of the US respondents answered that they had seen an increase in NCMEC reports, whereas only one quarter of the European and Swedish respondents agreed. Many US respondents reported a considerable increase, whereas the large majority of European and Swedish respondents reported a moderate increase.

Spike in beginning of pandemic

A number of respondents reported a sharp spike in NCMEC reports at the beginning of the pandemic. This spike was reported to be largely due to a number of files going viral, without criminal intent. They were posted by outraged individuals, who, in one instance, wanted to identify a child

(not understanding the negative impact such distribution may have on the victim), or as part of a public movement to actively search for and report CSAM to bring attention to the issue. More about this can be found in the expert comment on page 28 from John Shehan at NCMEC.

“ Our cybertip reports for the month of March were up 122 % compared to March 2019 and 156 % compared to March 2018.”

“ While there has been an increase in the overall number of online CSE reports, this is in part due to similar reports of memes and comics/ media – shared over one or multiple platforms.”

“ Increase in NCMEC reports are based on 1 month and a massive viral spread of a single file. I do not consider this to be a result of COVID.”

Effects of remote work

A number of respondents also commented that the NCMEC reports were affected by the lockdowns and NCMEC staff working remotely. In a comment to this Insight, John Shehan from NCMEC talks about the problems they have seen rise from the pandemic, and how they have developed new processes to deal with the challenges presented by remote work.

“ NCMEC personnel worked from home for a time; were unable to triage and cancel non-CSAM; more tips sent to investigators for review.”

“ NCMEC is only operating with a minimal staff so we have been unable to register new Child Exploitation Material with NCMEC or compare recovered Child Exploitation Material to NCMEC’s database of identified victims.”

“ NCMEC staff on lockdown has had a direct effect in volume and quality of reports.”

Hotlines

The US respondents also reported higher numbers of reports from hotlines and from individuals directly to law enforcement, than Sweden, UK and Europe. European respondents reported more of an increase than the respondents in Sweden and the UK. However, important to note is that many respondents answered that they don’t know. Among the Swedish respondents more than seventy percent answered “don’t know”.

“ I expect that the hotlines are all confined and not working. I’d have expected more reports from the public but we generally rely on the hotline reports to interact with the public.”

Isolation and more time online

When respondents were asked to elaborate on their answers, half of the respondents who commented said that more time spent at home, due to lockdowns and social restrictions, had led to an increase in reports of child sexual abuse (CSA) and CSAM.

SHARE OF RESPONDENTS IN EACH COUNTRY/SAMPLE THAT REPORTED AN INCREASE OR CHANGE IN NUMBERS OF REPORTING.

	USA			Sweden		
	Considerable increase	Moderate increase	Unchanged	Considerable increase	Moderate increase	Unchanged
Number of reports from NCMEC	36 %	21 %	20 %	10 %	17 %	17 %
Number of reports from hotlines and similar organisations	11 %	30 %	27 %	2 %	7 %	12 %
Number of reports directly to law enforcement	14 %	25 %	28 %	3 %	7 %	16 %
	UK			Europe		
	Considerable increase	Moderate increase	Unchanged	Considerable increase	Moderate increase	Unchanged
Number of reports from NCMEC	23 %	14 %	23 %	5 %	21 %	26 %
Number of reports from hotlines and similar organisations	3 %	20 %	34 %	5 %	19 %	31 %
Number of reports directly to law enforcement	3 %	12 %	27 %	3 %	28 %	33 %

Similar to Insight 1 and 2 in this report, many respondents mentioned that more time online for both offenders and children, and children often spending more unsupervised time online, has affected especially online CSA crime. Several mentioned that lack of social interaction and boredom may have created and accelerated destructive behaviour.

“ The number of people using the internet has increased and people that are normally busy with life are making bad decisions due to inactivity.”

“ Lockdown leads to boredom and symptoms of social disconnect. Socially disconnected people seem more likely to be able to accept the abuse within the images, this makes receiving sexual gratification less taboo from their perspective.”

“ With people being home and nothing to do, I believe people are starting to ‘explore’ areas that they may not have in the past.”

More reporting

A few respondents highlighted that increased reporting may be a result of more people accidentally coming across CSAM when they spend more time online.

“ People pass more time online therefore find and report more child abuse material, that they find when looking for other subjects.”

A few of the respondents instead thought that the increased reporting may be a result of children being more supervised than usual, as both adults and children had been spending more time at home.

“ More concerned adults are home to report or check on their previously unsupervised kids.”

“ The parents are also staying more at home so the children have someone to tell. The parents have also better control of what’s going on and maybe they check their children’s units more often.”

NCMEC AND NCMEC REPORTS

NCMEC, The National Center for Missing & Exploited Children, is a private, non-profit corporation in the US. Its mission is to help find missing children, reduce child sexual exploitation, and prevent child victimisation.

NCMEC operates the CyberTipline, a national mechanism that the public, and electronic service providers use to report instances of suspected child sexual exploitation. These reports are made available to appropriate law enforcement agencies, both nationally and internationally, for review and potential investigation.

JOHN SHEHAN

Vice President, Exploited Children Division, National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC), USA

WE HAVE SEEN A DEFINITE INCREASE IN CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE CRIME DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

We have seen a big increase in all types of reports that we receive, both cybertips from industry and reports from the public. We always see an annual increase in reports, but this increase is bigger than expected, and I'm convinced that it is a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. I think offenders see an opportunity with distracted parents and more children online.

Cybertips from industry, such as social media platforms have increased in 2020. In 2019 we received 16.9 million reports, a number that we had surpassed already in September 2020.

Increase in online enticement

Online enticement, when someone is interacting with a child online with the intent to commit a sexual offence (for example grooming or sexually extorting a child), is one of the most pronounced trends. From March to August, the online enticement reports doubled compared to the year before, from 11,658 cases in 2019, to 22,751 in 2020.

Darknet activity

On the darknet and TOR there has also been an increase in activity in connection to the COVID-19 pandemic. Offenders are known to have discussed the opportunities that the pandemic offers them.

Reports from the public

The number of reports from the public has also gone up. In 2019, we received 103,000 reports, in 2020, we had already received 199,000 reports by August. I believe that when people

stay at home or quarantine for long durations of time, they have more time online, which increases the potential to come across this type of material.

Increase in quantity of CSAM

In the beginning of the pandemic, some of the increase was a result of a few files of child sexual abuse material (CSAM) going viral, but without criminal intent. Mobilised groups actively sought and reported images and videos, to try to bring attention to the subject. Some have been sharing images out of outrage for the child, or in attempts to identify the child, not understanding the damage this does to the child and without considering that it is an illegal act.

However, this is only a small proportion of the reports that we have received. There has without a doubt been much more CSAM shared with criminal intent during this period; both the number of individuals sharing CSAM and the quantities of CSAM have gone up.

Capacity to investigate

I know there have been periods of time, especially in those states that have

been most severely impacted by COVID-19, where law enforcement in the US have been strained for resources, and resources have had to be reassigned for brief periods of time. I also know judicial processes have sometimes slowed down, which means there is going to be a backlog in investigations and trials going forward.

At NCMEC we have been working remotely since March. CSAM has to be reviewed in the office, so we have had three teams that rotate doing that. It was a transition when we went from working in the office to working from home, and we had to re-examine our workflows, but it has worked well. In some way this has helped to forward a number of different programmes.

We now have better workflows in place to reduce duplications and bulk review reports, assess the possible rescue of a child, assess meta data, etc. We have also been able to increase our database significantly. We've more than doubled our hashes of images, and hashes of videos have gone from 20,000 before COVID-19 to 200,000.

“
From March to August,
the online enticement
reports doubled compared
to the year before, from
11,658 cases in 2019,
to 22,751 in 2020.

”

4 MODERATE INCREASE IN ACTUAL INVESTIGATIONS AND CASES

- / Half of the respondents report an increase in possession, receipt and distribution cases, and in online child sexual abuse cases, such as grooming and sexual extortion.
- / Just over a quarter of respondents report an increase in physical child sexual abuse cases.
- / The US reports the highest increase in cases, Sweden reports the lowest.
- / Some police officers report changes in the nature of possession, receipt and distribution cases, as well as grooming and sexual extortion cases.

This section looks at the actual cases and investigations that law enforcement professionals have worked with during the COVID-19 pandemic, and whether they have seen a change in volumes, types or nature of child sexual abuse (CSA) crimes.

Moderate increase

Half of the respondents report an increase in both possession, receipt and distribution cases, and in online CSA cases, such as grooming and sexual extortion. Four in ten also report an increase in cases that involve voluntarily self-produced CSA material. Of those who report an increase, the majority report a moderate increase for all those categories.

“ I believe there are more children online self-producing.”

“ The biggest increase is sextortion. I have several suicidal victims. There is an increase of contact with subjects overseas, rather than all domestic subjects like before.”

Voluntarily self-produced

Voluntarily self-produced material

includes all material that has been produced without a sexual intent by the child, or when an older child produces material with consent, which is then spread on the internet. A few of the surveyed police officers commented that they had seen an increase in young people sharing self-produced material of themselves in exchange for money during the COVID-19 pandemic.

“ The voluntarily self-produced CSAM cases we have seen involve selling self-produced images. Due to economic depression, kids are seeing this as a way to make money for things they could otherwise not afford.”

“ Children spending more time on the internet. Younger people sharing images for money as other forms of income diminished.”

Physical CSA

The number for physical CSA cases is lower, just over a quarter of the police officers reported an increase. Several respondents commented that the lack of an increase in reports may be a result of school closures and children

being separated from mandatory reporters, and that the actual number of children being physically abused could be much higher.

“ With children being confined to their homes and not in school has caused an uptick in sexual abuse cases. The perpetrator is usually in the home or close to the victim. The safety net of school is missing, putting children in harm's way. This also goes for reporting. Several abuse cases come through a school official, especially when the child feels that he/she is in a safe place.”

“ Decrease in contact offending has been a result of pathways children have to report being removed/ limited.”

“ I believe the decrease is in reporting only and the cases are still occurring.”

“ Children are not being monitored or protected during the school year.”

WHETHER THERE HAVE BEEN ANY CHANGES TO THE NUMBER OF ACTUAL CSA CASES DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC.

	Considerable increase	Moderate increase	Unchanged	Moderate decrease	Considerable decrease	Don't know/ unable to answer
Possession, receipt and distribution	20 %	30 %	21 %	1 %	2 %	26 %
Online CSA, such as grooming and sexual extortion	17 %	32 %	23 %	1 %	1 %	26 %
Voluntary self-production	14 %	27 %	24 %	1 %	0 %	34 %
Physical/hands-on CSA	7 %	21 %	23 %	5 %	1 %	43 %

THE SHARE OF RESPONDENTS IN EACH COUNTRY/SAMPLE THAT REPORTED AN INCREASE (CONSIDERABLE OR MODERATE) IN NUMBERS OF CASES.

	USA	Sweden	UK	Europe
Possession, receipt and distribution	66 %	22 %	53 %	31 %
Online CSA, such as grooming and sexual extortion	55 %	36 %	48 %	44 %
Voluntary self-production	50 %	13 %	32 %	37 %
Physical/hands-on CSA	36 %	7 %	26 %	24 %

THE SHARE OF RESPONDENTS IN EACH COUNTRY/SAMPLE THAT REPORTED UNCHANGED NUMBERS OF CASES.

	USA	Sweden	UK	Europe
Possession, receipt and distribution	16 %	18 %	17 %	38 %
Online CSA, such as grooming and sexual extortion	22 %	22 %	19 %	28 %
Voluntary self-production	23 %	27 %	23 %	28 %
Physical/hands-on CSA	22 %	22 %	19 %	35 %

Unchanged

One in five respondents also reported that the number of investigations and CSA cases has remained unchanged during the COVID-19 pandemic.

“ For my department, I have only seen an increase in cybertips which have uploads/downloads dates from the period when the lockdown started. There have been some sexting/ corruption of minors cases between children and adults, however the number of these types of cases has not seemed to deviate from its normal amounts.”

More time online

When asked to elaborate on the reasons for the changes they had seen, similar to the previous insights, more than half of the respondents believed that the changes in investigations and cases were due to people spending more time at home as a result of lockdowns and social restrictions. Also similar to the previous insights, many respondents highlighted that offenders had possibilities to spend more time online, and that children also spent much more time online, often unsupervised.

“ The reason for this change is due to restrictions. Being non-stop with or without a victim of CSAM has made offenders take action in their own way.”

“ Likely due to more free time, and more people/children online during quarantines.”

“ Everyone is home, everyone is online occupying their time, it allows for those with this propensity to have increased access.”

A number of respondents pointed to psychosocial effects, such as isolation and stress.

“ Because people have no restrictions at home and fall victim to their own additions.”

“ Stressed offenders are acting out as lockdowns and quarantines take hold in everyday life.”

Difference between countries

Countries/regions reported differently on this issue. Whereas more than five and six in ten of the UK and US respondents reported an increase in possession, receipt and distribution cases, only two in ten of the Swedish respondents, and three in ten of the European respondents, reported the same.

>>

4 MODERATE INCREASE IN ACTUAL INVESTIGATIONS AND CASES

>> Considerably fewer Swedish respondents reported an increase in voluntary self-production cases and physical CSA cases than the other countries. Again, many Swedish respondents answered that they don't know.

There is less of a difference in online CSA crime.

Too early to know

As in the previous insights, several respondents commented that it is still too early to see the full effects on CSA crime from the COVID-19 pandemic.

“ I believe that we will see a change in a couple of months, the statistics are a little behind, if you know what I mean. The kids who are offended or exposed to these crimes may not tell right away.”

“ It's hard to determine the content at this point due the large amount of backlogged cases that are still being worked that all originated during this time span.”

Possession, receipt and distribution

The majority of respondents had not seen a change in the nature of the possession, receipt and distribution cases that they worked on during the early days of the COVID-19 pandemic. However, one in five reported that they had seen a change.

The types of changes reported were primarily an increase in the volumes of child sexual abuse material (CSAM) in their cases, but also more newly produced CSAM and changes in the types of CSAM. The changes in the types of CSAM mentioned, range from more self-produced material, younger children and more violent content, to more parents producing CSAM of their children. Other changes mentioned were more viral content being shared, and more children sharing CSAM with each other.

“ Collections are getting larger, people have more ready access to time and space as they are working from home and not at the office.”

“ The material captured is more diverse and globally sourced instead of the previous trends from South East Asia or Eastern European.”

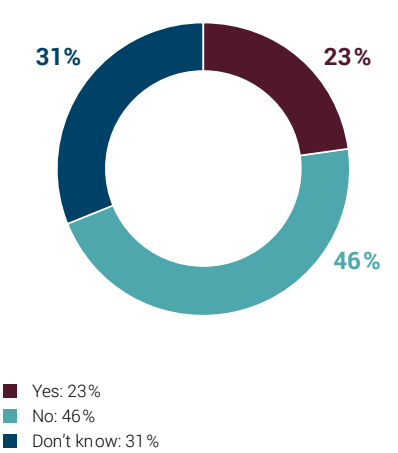
“ The self-produced material is becoming more serious and more advanced.”

“ New content is increasing, especially self-produced or groomed content.”

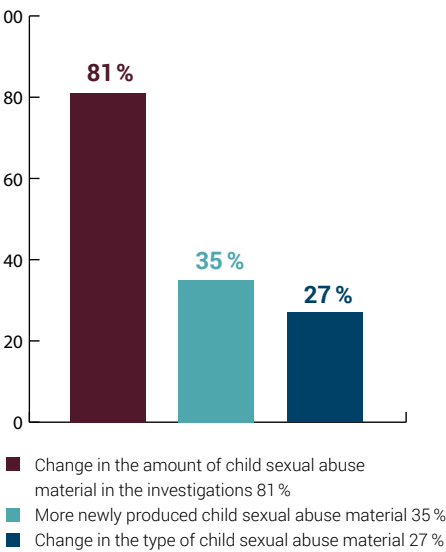
“ We are seeing more "viral videos" that are being distributed by offenders who are not actually interested in CSAM, but are spreading the videos still.”

“ A significant increase in CSAM produced and distributed among children.”

WHETHER THERE HAVE BEEN CHANGES IN THE NATURE OF POSSESSION, RECEIPT AND DISTRIBUTION CASES.



TYPES OF CHANGES SEEN IN POSSESSION, RECEIPT AND DISTRIBUTION CASES.



Types of changes seen by the group of respondents who reported seeing a change in possession, receipt and distribution cases.

Grooming and sexual extortion cases

A majority of respondents either reported that they had not seen any changes in the nature of the grooming and sexual extortion cases that they had worked on during the COVID-19 pandemic, or that they don't know.

However, one quarter reported that they had seen changes in their investigations. The majority of those reported a change in offender behaviour, followed by changes in types of platforms where children were contacted, and change to what children were convinced or coerced into doing.

Several police officers commented that the lockdowns and social restrictions during the COVID-19 pandemic affected how isolated children were, increasing their risk for victimisation.

“ The volume of cases has simply increased. Children who are victimized by sextortion have fewer resources for help due to isolation, meaning the extortion gets very bad before adults are aware of it and intervene.”

“ I have seen more kids seeming to self-produce out of boredom or thinking it is a game. I have also seen a drastic lowering in ages of self-producing victims, down to kindergarten.”

More platforms

Several of the police officers reported an increase in the number of platforms used to contact, groom and sexually extort children.

“ They use more different social media to find and reach out to children.”

“ More and more platforms emerging and cross between other platforms.”

More aggressive offenders

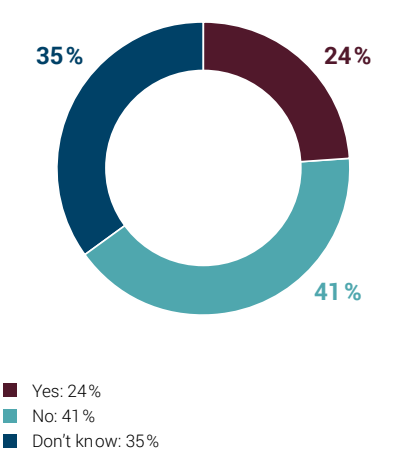
The surveyed police officers also commented that offender behaviour had become more aggressive during the period.

“ Offenders seems to be much more aggressive to me; as I conduct proactive undercover chat cases the majority of the time.”

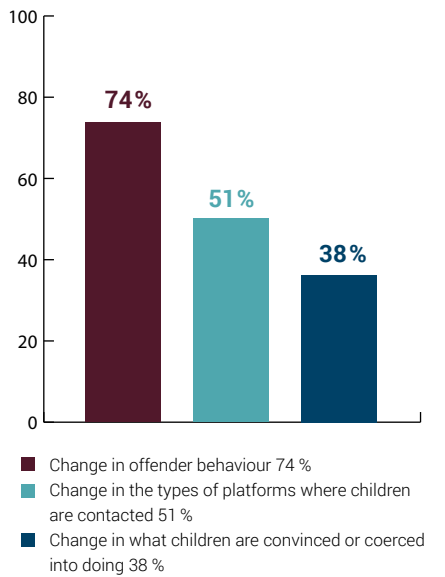
“ With kids being stuck at home, I think that predators feel that they have a large victim pool. In the chat evidence that I have reviewed they seem to jump from victim to victim faster than before and put less effort into grooming and more effort into finding a susceptible victim.”

“ The offenders dealt with during lockdown have, in my opinion, been far more brazen in their activities and requests to children and who they think are children.”

WHETHER THERE HAVE BEEN CHANGES IN GROOMING AND SEXUAL EXTORTION CASES.



TYPES OF CHANGES SEEN IN GROOMING AND SEXUAL EXTORTION CASES.



Types of changes seen by the group of respondents who reported seeing a change in grooming and sexual extortion cases.

JOHN PIZZURO

NJ ICAC Commander, New Jersey State Police, USA

ONLINE CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE HAS INCREASED BY MORE THAN 75 PERCENT DURING THE PANDEMIC

For perpetrators, the COVID-19 pandemic is like a perfect storm. Lockdowns have had a major impact on both children and adults as they have spent more time online, and the result has been a dramatic increase of online child sexual abuse crime. With both groups addicted to their devices, children are left unsupervised online and more susceptible to grooming.

In the US, each state is different, but online complaints have gone up by between 75–200 percent compared to last year. These are both complaints of child sexual abuse material and grooming. Self-produced videos have increased dramatically, and the number of videos with younger children, between the ages of 6–9 years old, have gone up. In my opinion this is a result of more and younger children getting their own mobile phones, and spending more unsupervised time online.

I see a direct correlation between the increase of online child sexual abuse crime and the increase in screen time during the pandemic as a result of lockdowns and social restrictions. The psychological impact of isolation, less structured communities, and the addiction that both adults and children have to their devices, adds fuel to the situation.

Increase in cybertips

This increase is also reflected in the volumes of cybertips from NCMEC that have been referred to law enforcement. In New Jersey, we have received close to 7,000 cybertips this year compared to 4,500 last year.

There are several different reasons for this increase. One is that NCMEC

processes were affected when their personnel had to work from home. That meant that tips were coming through to us that normally would have been filtered out by NCMEC, increasing our workload. In addition, when people spent more time online, they had more opportunities to discover and report child sexual abuse material, and a number of child sexual abuse files also went viral at the beginning of the pandemic.

However, I would say most of the increase is in actual increased perpetrator activity. My estimation is that 50 percent of the cybertips we received relate to increased perpetrator activity, 25 percent is due to the effect on NCMEC's processes, and another 25 percent is viral or age difficult material.

Reports of offline crimes

At the same time, we've seen a decrease in reports concerning offline child sexual abuse. My guess is that there are probably more actual instances of offline child sexual abuse, especially where children have been locked down with the person who is abusing them, but we have not been able to capture this yet. Most reports concerning hands-on abuse come from schoolteachers and other mandatory reporters, and during

lockdown and school closures no one is seeing the damage done to these children.

Law enforcement capacity

The pandemic has mainly affected us, law enforcement, by the sheer increase in volumes of child sexual abuse material and cases – we are inundated.

From a mental health point of view that is taking a toll on the police officers working in this field. This also means that we cannot act on other sources of information. We are not dealing with peer-to-peer downloads, and whereas last year we did two or three chat operations, we have not done any of those this year.

We have also been affected by courts being closed during periods of the pandemic. Other COVID safety precautions meant that for example in April and May we only acted on urgent search warrants. Some agencies have continued to only act on cases where there is reason to believe that a child is in immediate danger.

In addition to the COVID-19 pandemic, law enforcement around the country had to shift priorities during the riots in the US. Personnel had to be reassigned for two to three weeks, which of course caused backlogs.

“

I see a direct correlation between the increase of online child sexual abuse crime and the increase in screen time during the pandemic.

”

PATRICK CORDNER

Head of Swedish Cybercrime Center (SC3), National Operative Department, Sweden

WE HAVE NOT SEEN AN INCREASE IN CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE CRIME DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

It is still too early to know exactly how the COVID-19 pandemic has affected child sexual abuse (CSA) crime. However, at the National Operative Department and the IT Crime Centres in Sweden we have so far not seen an increase of CSA crime as a result of the pandemic. Neither has it affected Swedish law enforcement capacity to investigate this type of crime.

We expect an increase in child sexual abuse material (CSAM) every year. As more CSAM is uploaded to the internet it adds to the total volume of material. More and more material is also classified by law enforcement, and as a result we discover even more.

The crime itself is also increasing. More material is being shared on peer-to-peer networks and there is an increase in platforms, such as chat apps and games, where children can be contacted. There is a steady increase in self-produced material. In those cases it is always difficult to know whether the child is being threatened in order to produce the material. Other trends are an increase in young people sharing CSAM, from the ages of twelve to twenty years old, and an increase in paid for livestreamed CSA, where the victims are based abroad.

No COVID-related increase

It is not unreasonable to think that with more adults spending more time at home, these activities would increase. However, from what we can tell now, the COVID-19 pandemic has not resulted in an accelerated and unexpected increase of neither CSAM nor other CSA crimes in Sweden.

It's the same for NCMEC referrals. There is of course an increase in

reports, but it is an expected increase, and we don't see a peak related to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Children rarely report sexual abuse, instead these crimes are often discovered in connection to other crimes, or with a considerable delay in time. Therefore, it is too early to tell if there has been an increase in hands-on sexual abuse, but we have no indications that this would be the case.

I do see a potential risk for an increase in livestreamed CSA. With travel restrictions in place, offenders may instead turn to livestreaming. My worries with livestreamed CSA are that it is very difficult to discover and prevent.

Schools stayed open

Sweden stands out from other countries in Europe during this period, as primary and secondary schools (children between 6–15 years old) did not close. Children did not spend more time at home and online during daytime hours. During this period parents have spent more time at home, which if anything has led to more control and more supervised time than the other way around.

Unaffected capacity

CSA crime has been prioritised and

intensified throughout the pandemic, due to the fact that our new organisation, with regional IT Crime Centres, is now up and running, and we have been allocated more resources than before.

The only effects that the COVID-19 pandemic has had on the way we work is that more police officers have been working from home, and it's not possible to review CSAM in those environments. We've had to come into the office to do that. We've even had fewer sick-days recorded during this period.

International collaboration has slowed somewhat, and further education and skills development has had to take a step back. However, this has not affected our capacity to investigate crimes, or bring offenders to justice. The judicial system, judges and prosecutors, have also been able to continue working pretty much as normal.

I think that only in a few years' time will we be able to analyse what really happened during this period, and the effects that it had on CSA crime. What we already know is that Sweden was unique, especially in the beginning of the pandemic, in that schools did not close. With children living their lives almost as normal, it is not surprising if CSA crime also remained largely unaffected.

“

From what we can tell now, COVID-19 has not resulted in an accelerated and unexpected increase of neither CSAM nor other CSA crimes in Sweden.

”

ROB JONES

Director Threat Leadership, National Crime Agency, UK

NEARLY ALL INDICATORS POINT TO AN INCREASE IN CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE CRIMES

There will be a lag in the data that shows the full impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on child sexual abuse (CSA) crime. However, what we see is that all indicators point to that CSA has increased during the pandemic. The concern is that there's not a corresponding increase in referrals from industry into NCMEC and onward reporting to law enforcement, which could mean that many crimes go undetected and unreported.

An important indicator is the number of individuals that have contacted the Lucy Faithfull Foundation's 'Stop it now' hotline, which provides support for people concerned about their sexual feelings and behaviour. It has nearly doubled, from more than 300 every week in March to more than 600 in August. Data from the Lucy Faithfull Foundation also indicates that some individuals have developed this interest in lockdown.

Dark web offending was also on the increase, even before lockdown began. In 2019, 3.45 million accounts were registered globally across the ten most harmful CSA dark web sites, a near 20 percent increase over that of the preceding year.

School closures

During the school closures, we saw a downturn in reports from professionals. Simultaneously, we saw an uptick in reports from children and other reporters to Click CEOP*, which suggests that victims may have been locked down with their abusers and unable to reach out to professionals. From the time that schools opened again there has been a 130 percent increase in reports from professionals, compared to the same period last year.

Self-generated material

During the school closures, children spent more time online, often without

parental supervision. Use of livestreaming platforms, such as TikTok, increased sharply, and there are also indications of more captures of livestreaming by offenders. There is a gap in the data in this area, but for now we are working on the assumption that more offending has taken place.

The Internet Watch Foundation (IWF) reports seeing an increase in self-generated images during the period, with some 50 percent of their time having been spent on self-generated material.

Searches for CSAM

The IWF also reports a steeper increase than expected in blocked attempts to access websites known to contain child sexual abuse material (CSAM). This data reflects activity on home networks during the period of the first lockdown in the UK.

Concern about industry referrals

To summarise, all intelligence indicates an increased problem. The one exception that we see, and a big concern that we have, is that the increase is not reflected in industry referrals to NCMEC. The number of referrals has remained stable throughout this period.

Our assumption, or fear, is that industry (such as Facebook) opted to lean on the side of caution rather than child protection. What I mean by that

is that when industry moderators could no longer work in the office, they could not review CSAM. Instead, industry relied on AI and machine learning. To avoid false positives, these AI applications may have been set at a very conservative level, which would produce a smaller amount of results. The result may lead to CSA and CSAM going undetected and unreported.

Law enforcement capacity

CSA is a national priority in the UK, and we sustained our capacity during this period. We went to remote work where we could, and took measures to minimise risk to officers. Infection rates among our headcount have been low, and we have managed to organise our workload well. It's been a challenge, but if anything our levels of activity went up.

At the start of the pandemic, there were indications that offenders saw it as an opportunity. Therefore, we intensified and coordinated efforts which led to 98 arrests, of which fourteen worked in positions of trust. More than two hundred children were safeguarded. We also launched an education campaign, #onlinesafetyathome, aimed at carers, teachers and parents, these resources have been downloaded more than half a million times.

SIMON BAILEY

Chief Constable, Norfolk Constabulary, National Police Chiefs' Council Lead on Child Protection, UK

GROOMING ONLINE HAS INCREASED

I agree with the comments and analysis by NCA Director Rob Jones. You could describe the situation during the COVID-19 pandemic as almost a perfect storm, as the increase of children online has presented a great opportunity for paedophiles. At the same time industry platforms have had to rely on AI instead of human moderation. This has led to more imagery being available while there has been a decrease in content moderation and control.

We were always going to be concerned about the risks to children during lockdown, with many children spending more time online and on social media. We also recognised that paedophiles were likely to take the opportunity to exploit that. As we have come out of lockdown, we have seen that those concerns were justified.

Recent statistics show a big increase in grooming offences, and the number of referrals continues to increase. More and more children are coming forward and reporting crimes, and whereas we see a decrease in other child-based crimes, the number of reports of online grooming is greater than would have been expected in a "normal" year.

Reliance on AI

As the pandemic has forced industry to send staff home, platform providers have relied on AI moderation of their platforms. We are greatly concerned

that as a result there is now more CSAM on their sites than there would normally be. As we eventually come out of the COVID crisis and human moderators resume their work, it is likely that they will identify more imagery, particularly first generation, which will greatly increase post pandemic law enforcement workload.

Growing offending community

My view is that the lockdowns and social restrictions have provided greater opportunities online for existing paedophiles.

I also think that the offending community may be growing, as a consequence of lockdown. I base that on the reports from the Lucy Faithfull foundation of an increasing group of habitual pornography users who have started to look to CSAM to get kicks. It is something that we have to do research on to know for sure, but it is a real risk, concern and challenge.

Policing response

The policing response in the UK has remained as robust as ever during the COVID crises. This is illustrated in both the number of arrests and children safeguarded, which has continued to increase every quarter since the start of the pandemic.

However, the judicial system has definitely been affected by the lockdowns, which means that there is a backlog in processes. It will continue to affect law enforcement in many ways, as we, for example, have to remain involved with victims and witnesses for much longer than we normally would.

* Click CEOP is an online mechanism for reporting known or suspected child sexual exploitation or child sexual abuse directly to CEOP. CEOP (Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre) is a command of the UK's National Crime Agency.

5 COVID-19 HAS AFFECTED THE CAPACITY TO INVESTIGATE CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE CRIMES

- / More than half of the respondents report that the fallout from the pandemic has affected law enforcement capacity to investigate child sexual abuse crime.
- / Nearly half of the respondents report that warrants and court cases have been affected by the pandemic.
- / The prioritisation of child sexual abuse cases has been largely unaffected by the pandemic, however some respondents report reprioritisations.
- / US respondents generally report a bigger effect on law enforcement capacity, whereas Swedish respondents report largely unaffected law enforcement capacity.

Law enforcement's ability to investigate child sexual abuse (CSA) crimes is dependent on a number of different conditions and factors, such as the possibility to execute search warrants, conduct interviews, and review seized material to secure evidence. In this insight we look at whether the fallout from the COVID-19 pandemic, with its lockdowns and social restrictions, has impacted law enforcement capacity to investigate CSA crimes.

Effect on capacity

More than half of the respondents reported that the fallout from the COVID-19 pandemic affected their capacity to investigate CSA crimes. However, almost as many, four in ten, of the respondents reported that their capacity to investigate CSA crimes had remained unaffected by the pandemic.

Difference between countries

As seen in the previous insights, the results vary between different countries/regions. The answers from

the European sample were similar to the overall result (51 percent), whereas the UK numbers were slightly lower (47 percent). A breakout of the US respondents shows that nearly two-thirds reported an impact on their capacity to investigate CSA crimes, whereas just over one quarter of the Swedish respondents reported such an impact.

Several reasons

When asked to elaborate on their answers, the respondents commented that the impact was primarily due to an increase in workload, limited possibilities to conduct investigations when working remotely, limited possibilities to execute search warrants and difficulties in conducting interviews with victims, suspects and witnesses.

Increased workload

More than a quarter of the surveyed police officers reported an increase in workload and/or a reduction in resources as a consequence of the

pandemic. Many said that the increased workload was a result of a high inflow of new cases, combined with limited resources. Others commented that their resources have been reduced during the period.

“The volume of work and the lack of resources to tackle this has been a massive factor.”

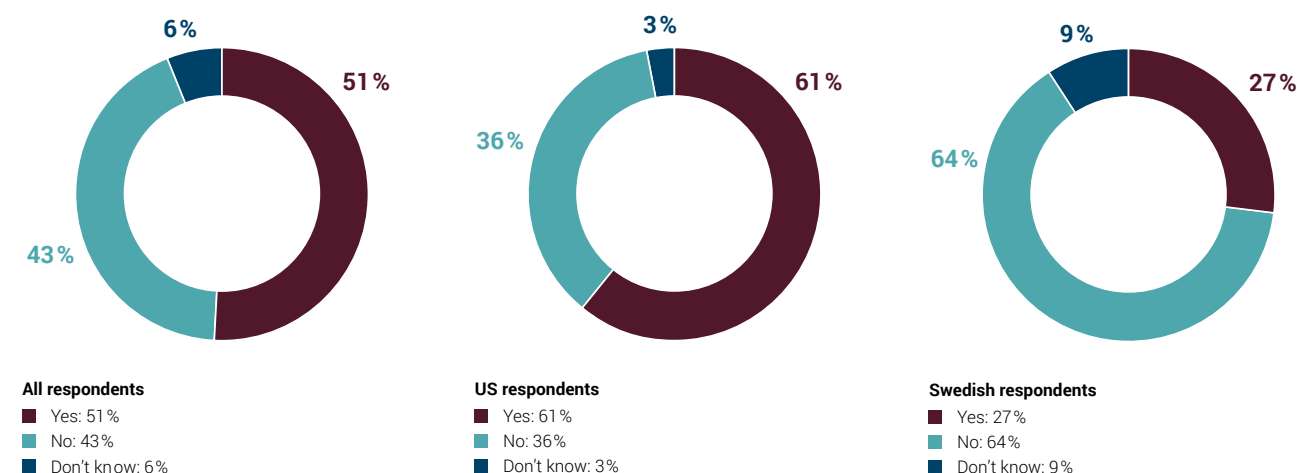
“More cases to investigate with the same resources.”

“There are more cases and the staffing numbers have not gone up.”

Limitations of remote work

More than one in five of the surveyed police officers reported that their ability to work on CSA cases had been limited due to remote work. The aspect of remote work that most respondents mentioned was that it is not possible to review CSA evidence from home, thus affecting their possibilities to work cases. Several respondents also

WHETHER THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC HAS AFFECTED LAW ENFORCEMENT AGENCIES' CAPACITY TO INVESTIGATE CSA CRIMES.



mentioned lack of collaboration and lack of access to databases and infrastructure as a consequence of remote work.

“Working from home, therefore material being worked on is restricted to non-illegal pictures/non-sexual abuse cases.”

“Cannot work CSAM cases outside of the office.”

“It is difficult to investigate with full capacity. Key factors are lack of collaboration, access to infrastructure etc.”

“Working remotely does limit some functions /databases that are only available in the office.”

Suspended search warrants

One in five police officers reported that suspended or limited execution of search warrants impacted their investigative work. Some reported that

only the most urgent warrants, for example those where a child is at risk, or where the suspect is a person of public trust, were executed. The large majority of those who mentioned an impact on search warrants were US respondents.

“My agency is severely limiting our ability to go out in public and to execute search warrants, do interviews, etc.”

“We have only been able to serve search warrants on homes where we know there is a live victim or a person of public trust.”

“Suspended the execution of Search Warrants on Residences.”

Difficulties in conducting interviews

More than one in ten respondents reported that the lockdowns and social restrictions during the COVID-19 pandemic affected their ability to conduct interviews. Several mentioned

that social distancing made it difficult to go out in public and contact relevant individuals. Some also commented that wearing masks makes it difficult and can be counterproductive during interviews. Others reported that interviews were cancelled more frequently because of COVID-19 – when investigators or interrogators showed symptoms, or when suspects used COVID-19 as an excuse not to be interrogated.

“Agency policies restrict the ability to conduct interviews and knock and talks.”

“National, state and departmental restrictions on contact with individuals make it difficult to interview suspects. Among other things, masks and social distancing are counter-productive to effective interviewing techniques.”

>>

5 COVID-19 HAS AFFECTED THE CAPACITY TO INVESTIGATE CSA CRIMES

>> **“ More interrogations are cancelled when investigators or interrogators show symptoms. More and longer sick leave due to risk of infection.”**

Some respondents mentioned that travel restrictions had limited their ability to travel to other regions or countries to interview suspects and victims. This is something that several of the Swedish respondents mentioned specifically.

“ We as investigators are not able to travel to the countries where the crime was committed and are therefore not able to interview the victims/children.”

“ Cannot travel to interrogate in other countries.”

Effect on case processing time

Many commented that the different fallouts of the pandemic, mentioned above, slowed down processing time for cases. Remote work, slow court processes, difficulties in obtaining and executing search warrants, and a lack

of resources, are all examples of factors that slow down investigations.

“ Social distancing meaning different processes and workplace locations, creating slower processes.”

“ Less people at worksites. More COVID meetings takes time from investigations. Forensic analysis takes longer as people stay home.”

Although most respondents reported slower case processing time, there were exceptions. A few respondents reported that they were able to allocate more time and resources to investigate CSA cases during the COVID-19 pandemic.

“ Our agency has actually allocated more time and resources to CSAM cases.”

“ There has been decrease of sexual crimes against adults what allowed to dedicate much more time to CSAM cases investigations.”

Prioritisation of cases

Nearly three quarters of the surveyed police officers said that the prioritisation of CSA cases within their organisation remained unchanged during the COVID-19 pandemic. An even higher number of Swedish respondent, eight in ten, reported that prioritisation had remained unchanged.

One in five police officers reported that prioritisation of cases had changed during the pandemic.

Throughout this report, the UK and the European sample generally answered similar to the whole sample. For most questions, the US respondents reported bigger effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, whereas the Swedish respondents reported fewer effects. However, for this question it is interesting to note that the US and UK respondents answered similar to the overall results, whereas a higher share, one third, of the European respondents reported an effect on prioritisation of

CSA crime. However, there are no significant differences in the comments from the European sample, that could further explain this difference.

Effects of change in prioritisation

The respondents who reported a change in how CSA crimes had been prioritised during the pandemic commented that cases and individuals identified as high-risk were being prioritised, whereas those considered lower risk had to wait. Others commented that crimes concerning CSA had been given lower priority and that resources had been reassigned to other types of crime and tasks.

“ Priority is now children at risk, as opposed to only an indication that the offender is possessing/distributing.”

“ We are only going after the egregious cases that are either a person in authority school teacher, counsellor etc.”

“ Our Child Exploitation Unit members were reassigned to assist with protests, helping out the money laundering units and so forth. Teamwork is great amongst the agency, but it felt like our Child Exploitation cases were put to the back of the line in regards to importance.”

“ Due to the caseload we have to prioritise to higher extent than before, due to the fact that more violent crimes are being committed which decreases the amount of investigative time we can spend on investigating sexual crimes against children.”

More than half of the respondents who reported a change in prioritisation, also reported that some CSA cases risk not being investigated as an effect of this development.

Cases not investigated

According to the surveyed police officers, the cases that were considered lower risk, and therefore might not be investigated, were primarily different types of possession and distribution cases. This included cases with lower volumes of child sexual abuse material (CSAM), cases with victims who were older or age-indeterminate, and cases with known offenders without access to children, etc.

The respondents also mentioned that less severe grooming cases and cases involving voluntarily self-produced material, especially when sent between juveniles, were classified as lower risk. Low risk or single file NCMEC referrals were also specified by a few respondents.

“ Possession and distribution of CSAM.”

“ Single image NCMEC reports and teens sending images to other teens and getting exploited. There is no time to investigate AND no legal consequences for exploiting yourself or others if you are a juvenile.”

“ Hands on offenses will be investigated but distribution or possession of CSAM were put on hold.”

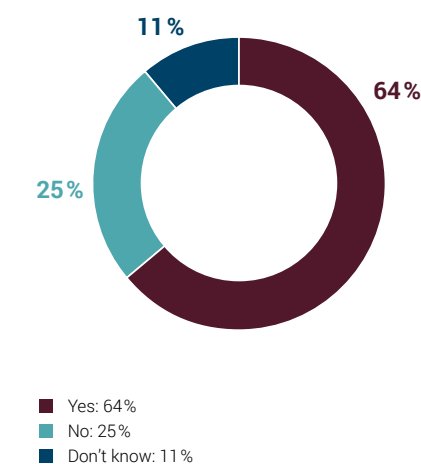
A few respondents also highlighted the potential risks associated with not investigating possession and distribution cases.

“ Predominance of contact offending is found on possession/distribution cases – lack of capacity to service these means children are at risk.”

Prioritised cases

The cases that were instead given priority, according to the surveyed police officers, were primarily hands-on CSA cases, and cases concerning

WHETHER A CHANGE IN PRIORITIES DURING COVID-19 RISK LEADING TO SOME TYPES OF CRIMES AGAINST CHILDREN NOT BEING INVESTIGATED.



The chart reflects the opinion of those respondents who reported a change in prioritisation of CSA crimes during the COVID-19 pandemic.

offenders with access to children or in a position of public trust. More than half of the respondents commented that contact offences or cases where a child is at risk of hands-on abuse, were being prioritised. Others reported that priority was instead given to other types of crime, such as murder, counter terrorism and narcotics.

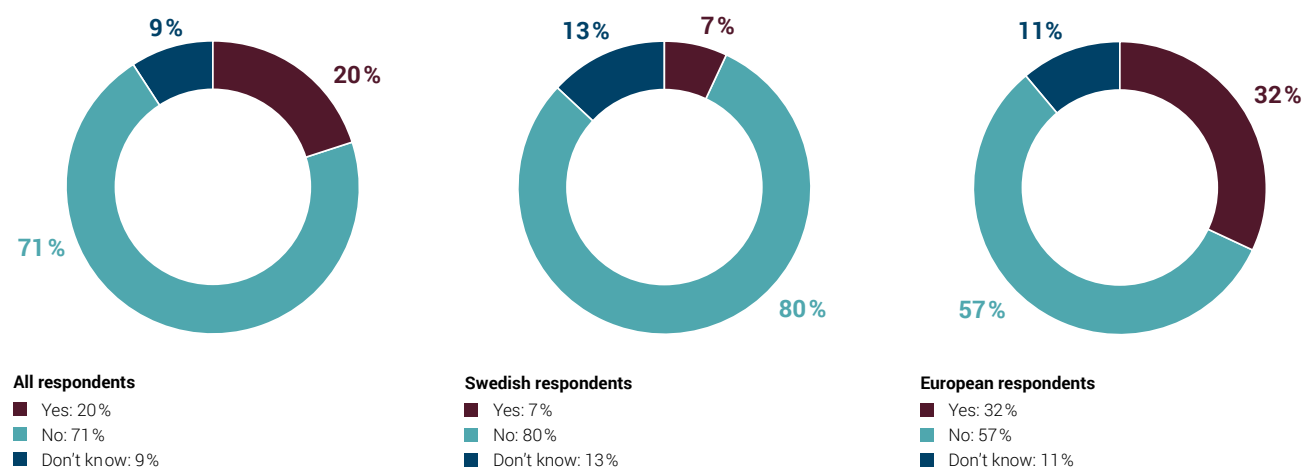
“ Priority is given where children are at risk/known to be in a residence.”

“ Any case where surveillance determines a child is in the home. Any case where a person of public trust resides in the home.”

“ Major crimes investigation such as murder, attempted murder, extortion etc.”

>>

WHETHER THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC HAS AFFECTED HOW INVESTIGATIONS INTO CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE CRIMES HAVE BEEN PRIORITISED.



5 COVID-19 HAS AFFECTED THE CAPACITY TO INVESTIGATE CSA CRIMES

>> Effects on warrants

More than one-third of the respondents reported that the COVID-19 pandemic affected which warrants were processed during the period. A breakdown into countries/regions showed that the UK and the European sample reflected the overall results. However, nearly half of the US respondents answered that processed warrants had been affected, whereas only one in ten of the Swedish respondents answered the same.

It is relevant to note, however, that nearly half of the US respondents also reported that warrants had not been affected, and very few said that they don't know. The respondents from the other samples answered "don't know" to a much higher degree.

When asked to elaborate on how the COVID-19 pandemic had affected which warrants were processed, the majority said that they had only been able to execute the most urgent search

warrants for high priority cases.

As described above, these are primarily where a child is at risk, or where the suspect is a person of public trust.

"Only emergent situations for life or integrity were considered in planning house searches and arrests."

"No execution of search warrants for possession of CSA material at the moment. Execution only in high priority cases."

"My agency only allowed for the service of search warrants if there was an articulable reason to believe a child was in danger."

While several of the respondents mentioned that the process of obtaining search warrants had slowed down as a result of limited court capacity, some reported new and improved processes as a result of the same.

"This has been a big benefit to us in ease of obtaining warrants which are now being conducted online. This was something the courts in our area were not prepared to engage in at all pre-COVID and full days could be wasted at courts waiting to have a warrant heard."

"More telephonic approvals by judges and prosecutors, but that has increased efficiency."

Effects on court cases

Nearly half of the respondents also reported a change in which court cases had been processed during the COVID-19 pandemic. The share of US respondents who reported an effect on court processes were, as with many of the other questions, even higher; six in ten. This was also reflected in the comments, with more US respondents focusing on court closures and delays in their comments than respondents from the other samples.

Only one in ten of the Swedish respondents reported an effect on court processes as a result of the pandemic. Worth noticing is, however, that considerably more respondents from this sample answered "don't know", compared to the others. The result from the UK respondents and European sample reflects the overall result.

Delayed court hearings

More than half of the respondents who reported an effect on court cases, commented that court hearings and trials had been either delayed or suspended as a result of reduced court capacity during the pandemic. Some respondents said that, as a result of this, backlogs were building up and trial dates were pushed into the future.

"Trial courts have been closed, so there has been a delay in prosecutions."

"For several months, the courts were closed and no cases were heard. Now that they are back open, there is a backlog of cases."

"Courts are backlogged because of restrictions due to COVID-19."

Suspects getting probation or bail

Several respondents also reported that offenders were getting probation or bail instead of being incarcerated, as a consequence of congested courts, closed courts or heavily reduced court hours.

"Limited grand jury time, courts down to 1 or 2 duty judges per day, quicker pleas and sentences for what the courts deem low level child exploitation offenders, who are not getting sentenced to jail time and instead are receiving probation."

"There are no trials for the foreseeable future so there is no reason to plea cases without trial. Offenders are being released pending trials being reinstated in 2021."

Only high-priority cases

Nearly one in five of the surveyed police officers reported that courts had to prioritise more between cases, and that only those considered high priority were being handled. Some mention that only cases where arrests had been made were being processed.

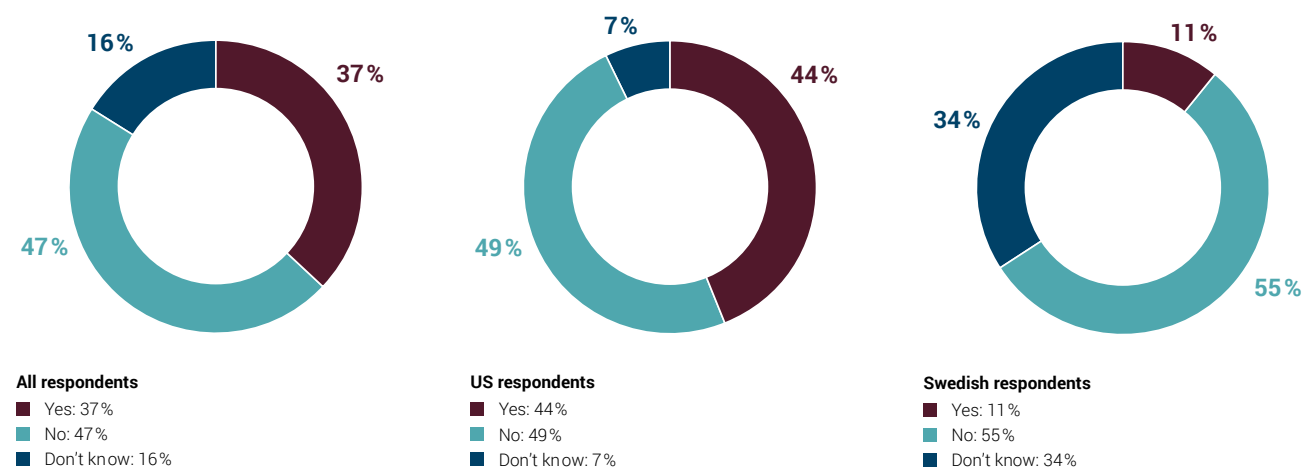
"Only those cases were processed that had arrested perpetrators, the other cases were suspended."

"District court sessions are all delayed. Now when the sessions have started again, only the most urgent cases are handled."

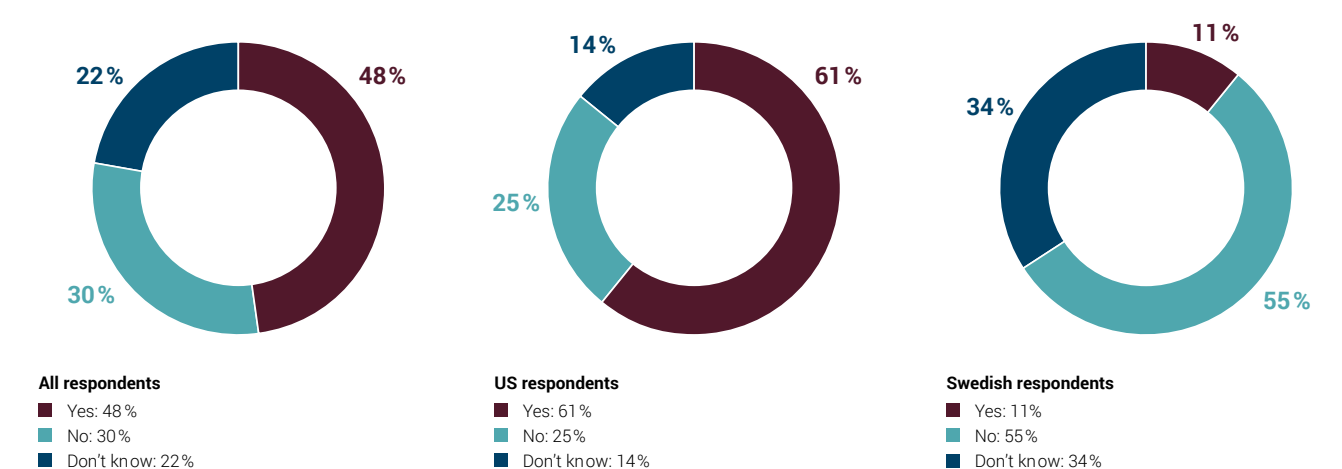
"High priority cases take precedence."

>>

WHETHER COVID-19 HAS AFFECTED WHICH WARRANTS HAVE BEEN PROCESSED.



WHETHER COVID-19 HAS AFFECTED WHICH COURT CASES HAVE BEEN PROCESSED.



5 COVID-19 HAS AFFECTED THE CAPACITY TO INVESTIGATE CSA CRIMES

>> Consequences

The respondents who reported an impact on warrants and court cases, commented that the consequences of warrants not being processed and courts not processing some types of cases, constitutes a risk of offenders going undetected or being able to continue offending, and victims being left in abusive environments. They also answered that there is a risk of evidence being destroyed or becoming invalid, and a backlog being built up in both court processes and law enforcement investigations.

Victims left in abusive environments

One quarter of the police officers who commented on the question, said that there is a risk of offenders either going undetected or being able to continue to abuse victims, as a consequence of the effects on the judicial system. One in five respondents highlighted a risk that this may result in victims being left in abusive environments.

“ Offenders are being allowed to continue criminal activities and offences against children.”

“ The risk that child victims are left in an abusive environment.”

“ In worst case scenarios the suspect can continue to abuse children.”

“ Warrants are being progressed digitally, but a delay would prevent early safeguarding within the suspect’s family and early recovery of evidence.”

A number of respondents specifically commented that delays and down-prioritisation of possession, receipt and distribution cases may increase the risk of hands-on offending.

“ Extra case backgrounds are being conducted to determine potentials for hands on offenders. Fear that non-hands on offenders will be more likely to become hands on offenders without diligent enforcement.”

“ The probable cause for the warrant is only a piece of information and not indicative of full behavior, many big cases have started with simple possession.”

Destroyed or invalid evidence

Other respondents mentioned a potential risk of evidence being destroyed or becoming invalid, or evidence becoming old and difficult to investigate and verify.

“ Further potential harm to victims. Offenders absconding. Potential evidence being destroyed by alleged offenders.”

“ Some criminal case’s cause of action may date.”

“ Potentially, evidence could be lost. If the IP logs or other valuable data is deleted due to a standard schedule and we are late to address the case then we may not have the records we need to determine the suspects identity and location.”

“ Longer turnaround times and less valid actionable information.”

“ Cases are losing the urgency and evidence.”

Risk of backlogs

One in five of the police officers who commented on the question, also reported a risk of backlogs, for both courts and law enforcement, as warrants were not being processed, court hours limited, and cases were being pushed back.

“ Workload is backing up and will require a considerable amount of work at a later date to catch up.”

“ Everything is being delayed creating a jam, which is going to have to be fixed down the road.”

“ Massive backlog incoming for everyone, cases will be rushed and things will be missed putting children at higher risk.”

“ A huge backlog after lockdown.”

URI SADEH

Adv. MSc. Coordinator of the Crimes against Children Unit, INTERPOL

LAW ENFORCEMENT HAS ADAPTED TO THE CHALLENGES

The COVID-19 pandemic has affected how law enforcement work, and in some cases also law enforcement and judicial capacity across the world. There has been a temporary reduction in use of the INTERPOL International Child Sexual Exploitations (ICSE) database, and data shows an increase in the amount of child sexual abuse material (CSAM) consumed and circulated. However, in our view the increase has been more moderate than has frequently been reported.

We released a report in September 2020 that shows the detriment that COVID-19 has had on law enforcement capacity to investigate child sexual abuse (CSA) crime. Problems include victims finding it difficult to report the crime, and courts in some countries being closed down, or processes significantly slowed down.

Decreased use of ICSE

One of the clear findings is a decreased use of INTERPOL’s ICSE database. The database is used by victim identification specialists worldwide to analyse and compare CSAM.

We found that differences in use of the database, were unrelated to how severely countries had been affected by COVID-19, and unrelated to their level of technological development. It was rather individual policy decisions of the use of personnel during this period, and whether CSA has remained prioritised or not, that influenced the use of the database.

Adapted to the situation

In the beginning of the pandemic law enforcement was quite affected, however, it has adapted to the situation, and as a result agencies across the world collaborate to deal with this crime; physically working in silos, but effectively using online channels. There is of course reduced ability to travel, but international cooperation, and identification of both victims and offenders is ongoing.

Increase in redistribution

From our data, we did see an increase in redistribution of CSAM particularly in peer-to-peer networks and in the amount of self-produced material. Our member countries also reported an increase in activity on darknet forums. There is a possible correlation between darknet chats and production of new material, however it will take time, probably years, before the scale of such potential material comes to the attention of law enforcement and the true impact of this period can be analysed.

Exaggerated numbers

We believe that at the outset there was a tendency to exaggerate the spike in CSA crime, in different communications. For example, there were a lot of reports of zoom bombings, but when we asked our member countries, these were isolated incidents.

A rise in the number of NCMEC reports was also widely reported. There was an early increase; however, it was largely due to a change in the workflow due to COVID working conditions, which made processing faster. It was also a result of some files going viral without criminal intent. Platform providers that report to NCMEC, have had their staff working from home. As a result their ability to analyse suspected CSAM was reduced.

We need more time to understand the consequences of the pandemic. Both adults and children were highly present online prior to the pandemic. While time spent online has increased, confinement does not necessarily increase risk, and depending on the family context, could also provide a more controlled environment than during normal periods. Restrictions in travel also means a reduction in travel of transnational sex offences.

Future risks

A potential risk is linked to the fact that home online schooling has led to children being exposed and introduced to the internet earlier than they would be otherwise. We know that the internet has an addictive aspect, and the impact of a generation being put online at such early stage remains to be seen.

The aftermath of the pandemic may lead to increased poverty and more unstable social structures in some countries or areas. There are some indications that this may in turn affect an already emerging trend of commercial remote sexual abuse of children using live streaming, especially when combined with offenders’ reduced ability to travel. There is also the concern that a spike in child abuse by travelling sex offenders will follow the lifting of travel restrictions.

6 FUTURE CONSEQUENCES ON CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE CRIME

- / Risk of delayed reporting.
- / Risk of increase in hands-on child sexual abuse.
- / Risk of law enforcement and courts being affected by backlogs and lack of resources.

In this final Insight, the respondents were asked if they believe that the fallout from the COVID-19 pandemic will have further far-reaching consequences for child sexual abuse (CSA) investigations. More than half of the respondents answered that they believe that it will.

The respondents who commented on the question outlined three major trends that they believe will affect future CSA investigations, all of which have also been outlined in the previous Insights in this report: An increase in cases due to delays in reporting, an increase in reported offline CSA as a result of underreporting during the pandemic, and backlogs and decreases in law enforcement resources that could affect law enforcement capacity to investigate CSA crimes.

Delayed reporting

The surveyed police officers commented that cases of CSA usually take a long time to reach law enforcement. As a consequence of the pandemic it is likely that it will take even longer. Therefore they anticipate a sharp rise in cases when society starts to return to normality and cases start to surface.

“ Many cases of grooming that are occurring at this time will be reported later, subsequent to COVID-19 and this pandemic.”

“ The number of cases (victim and perpetrators) will increase, because the information about it will come later.”

“ I believe there will be a sharp increase of cases across this crime type which will begin to emerge as “normality” returns. Police units were struggling to cope with demand before – I have no idea how we will manage effectively as cases increase. I am concerned that there will be numerous children who have been self-producing without fully understanding consequences of this and there will be issues as time goes on and more images become available online.”

“ I think that we still haven’t seen the full consequence of the COVID-19 pandemic, and that in the nearest future we will get more cases related to CSAM.”

Increase in hands-on CSA

Closely related to delayed reporting, the police officers also answered that there is a risk of underreported physical hands-on CSA crime. As a result of children being unable to contact mandatory reporters during periods of lockdowns and school closures, there is a risk of crimes going unreported. The police officers also reported that there is a higher risk of more physical CSA, or the abuse going on for longer periods of time, as children are isolated with their offenders during periods of restrictions.

“ Hands-on abuse will go on for longer periods of time due to lack of reporting.”

“ More children will have become victims because they are either at home with a predator 24/7 or the parent has had to place the child into a home with a predator that they wouldn’t normally choose, but childcare options are non-existent.”

“ When children return to normal activities, we may find that abuse was occurring while the children were unable to contact mandated reporters.”

“ I expect that post COVID we will experience an increase in reporting of contact offences as children are able to disclose.”

“ The full impact is still unknown but with abusive parents and children all being on lockdown there’s bound to be more hands-on abuse happening because, friends, schools and other family have been unable to monitor if any abuse has been happening.”

Backlogs and lack of resources

Many respondents reported a risk of backlogs affecting CSA investigations for a long time.

“ Case load will increase after the restrictions are lifted. Case backlog will be considerable and it will take time to process it. Limited resources will be under heavy strain from the workload.”

“ Massive backlog incoming for everyone, cases will be rushed and things will be missed putting children at higher risk.”

“ If cases are being delayed and investigated – justice for victims will be delayed.”

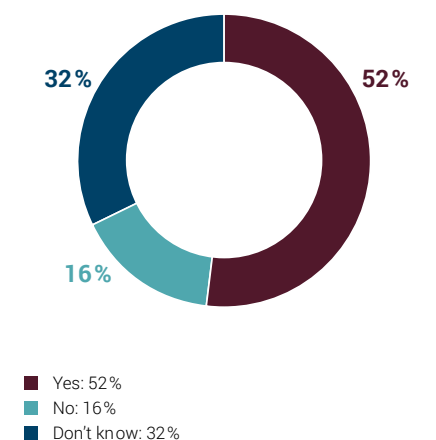
Combined with this, a number of respondents believed that resources may be cut as a result of a weaker post pandemic economy. This could, in turn, lead to fewer arrests.

“ COVID is destroying the economy thereby affecting funding which means ICAC teams are going to be underfunded in both personnel and equipment. When operations start back up, there will be an extraordinary amount of cases backlogged and not enough people to do it. Crimes and criminals are going to slip through the cracks.”

“ The backlogs have increased, however, continued underfunding of digital forensics will mean that it will be difficult if not impossible to “claw back” the ground lost with regards to the length of time between exhibit submission and examination.”

“ It will exacerbate an already stretched-thin police discipline. Most investigators I know are already overwhelmed and trying to stay ahead of cybertips, let alone any other referrals. I see this pandemic making matters worse and creating an even-worse backlog than before.”

WHETHER THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC WILL HAVE FURTHER FAR-REACHING CONSEQUENCES ON CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE CRIME.



ANNA BORGSTRÖM
CEO, NetClean

THE RESULTS SHOW AN IMPACT ON ONLINE CSA CRIME AND THE AMOUNT OF CSAM AVAILABLE ONLINE

The results from the law enforcement survey make it clear that it is still too early to draw major conclusions about how the COVID-19 pandemic has affected child sexual abuse (CSA) crime.

However, much of the data and responses that we got from the surveyed police officers, show worrying tendencies. The results indicate a considerable impact on online CSA crime and the amount of child sexual abuse material (CSAM) available online.

An underreported crime

The amount of CSAM material and the pace of which it is shared online was already impossible to get an overview of before the pandemic started. Child sexual abuse is a crime, online and offline, where a full picture is impossible to gather because we know that most children do not report if they have been sexually abused.

With all the changes and upheavals that came with the COVID-19 pandemic, it is not surprising that children have suffered alongside everyone else.

This is especially true when you consider that throughout many parts of the world people have spent much more time online. People have also been confined to their homes, and when restrictions have impacted on the work of law enforcement and their capacity to conduct investigations and prosecute criminals, children have become more vulnerable.

Effects on judicial systems

The results of the survey show that judicial systems have been affected, as many warrants have not been processed, and closed courts or reduced court hours have slowed down work. Police officers' own workload have increased, while at the same time having to deal with the limitations of working remotely, e.g. not being able to review evidence (CSAM) from the home, conduct interviews etc. It is noticeable however

that the expert analysis infers that in countries where CSA crimes have been highly prioritised, the shortcomings listed above have largely been negated.

Limit revictimisation

It is, as mentioned, still too early to get a clear picture of the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on CSA crime, however the surveyed police officers did agree that the volumes of CSAM is increasing, and that especially online CSA crime is increasing. They, and the experts who we asked to comment on our research, are however somewhat divided on whether this crime as a whole is increasing due to COVID-19 restrictions, or whether statistics and findings are just following the growth rate that we see year on year.

Concerning online crime, research shows that children who are sexually abused suffer more if they know that

their abuse has been documented, and the trauma is further accelerated if they know that the material has been shared online. Therefore, whether the increase in material online is a result of the COVID-19 pandemic or not, it is important that we work to stop the sexual abuse of children and the revictimisation that happens every time an image is shared.

Difference in reported effects

What we can also see in the report is that there is a considerable difference between how police officers from the US, the UK and the rest of Europe describe that the pandemic has affected CSA crime and law enforcement capacity to investigate these crimes, in comparison with how Swedish police officers responded. Even though there are a number of Swedish police officers who report that they have seen effects of the COVID-19 pandemic,

they report a much smaller change than the other respondents.

An indication from this result, is that school closures and lockdowns especially have increased the risk to children significantly. This has come from a lack of access to mandatory reporters, and from children spending much more time at home and online.

In Sweden schools were not closed and lockdowns were never implemented. Therefore the amount of time children spent online during school hours did not increase. And, with many parents working from home, Swedish children were perhaps, if anything, more monitored than before by their parents when spending time online after school. With the schools remaining open children also had access to mandatory reporters and other "safe" adults.

Without casting any aspersions on the restrictions that have been implemented across the world, it can be stated that from the perspective of the child, and on this particular issue, school closures and lockdowns contributed to the increased risk to children.

DRIVERS FOR ADDRESSING CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE MATERIAL IN A CORPORATE ENVIRONMENT

KEY INSIGHTS

- 7. Ethics and the safeguarding of children
- 8. Many stakeholders, many drivers
- 9. COVID-19 has increased remote working

Interviews

For this part of the report, interviews were conducted with individuals who work in organisations that have identified the risks associated with child sexual abuse material being consumed, downloaded or distributed within the company network or on company devices.

Sixteen individuals working in five different areas; Sustainability, Ethics & Compliance, IT Security, Human Resources and Legal were interviewed. The sixteen businesses and organisations were from a wide range of different industries, of different sizes, and from both the private and public sector. Companies that operate

on an international market and on a one-country market were both represented. The majority have Swedish head quarters.

The insights and views from the interviews are presented as a merged point of view. The objective was not to present a statistical overview of what the respondents said, but instead give insight into the drivers behind preventing child sexual abuse material from being consumed in a corporate environment. Individuals, organisations and industries have been anonymised in the report.

7 ETHICS AND THE SAFEGUARDING OF CHILDREN

The single most important reason for protecting the IT environment and IT equipment from child sexual abuse material (CSAM) is, according to the interviewed businesses, informed by a desire to operate ethically. In this case to safeguard and protect children.

The businesses that we interviewed believe that it is important to act ethically in order to be good corporate citizens. Ethics is at the core of their company values and they maintain that it is increasingly becoming more important that businesses contribute to the societies in which they operate. They believe that businesses here have an opportunity and obligation to contribute to development and improvement.

Do as much as they possibly can

They agree that it is not their responsibility to fight crime, but when they have the opportunity to help drive positive change, and do something to improve a big societal problem, they want and choose to do so.

“ Although we are not a law enforcement agency, we still want to do as much as we possibly can. As a company we aim to take action and make the world better. If we as employers can protect children, then we should.”

Beyond CSR

These ethical drivers are of course in many ways inseparable, or part of, sustainability and Corporate Social Responsibility strategies (CSR). For some of the businesses, the decision to act on CSAM aligns closely with sustainability. However, for other

companies, the connection to their sustainability strategies is not as strong. For many of these companies, the decision to act on the issue of CSAM in the business IT environment goes beyond sustainability and CSR strategies. One company said that they don't just want to clean CSAM out of their own IT environment, they also want to help law enforcement and society as much as they can.

“ We want to contribute to society. We do this for the sake of children and child victims. It is morally right, and care and concern should stretch beyond the boundaries of the company.”

Another company stated that it is enough of an incentive for them to act if they can safeguard **one** child from becoming a victim of child sexual abuse (CSA), or from being revictimised if images of the abuse are spread on the internet.

Finally, another said:

“ I cannot find any arguments as to why we as an employer shouldn't do this. It is a crime committed by an employee on a computer that we have provided. There are many hideous crimes that people commit that we can do nothing about, but this we can do something about. It is straightforward and easy to do.”

Pathos of public sector

The interviewed public sector organisations also added that their entire pathos is to serve citizens and taxpayers, and as such they have a responsibility, not to tackle crime, but to protect children and citizens. As publicly financed organisations they are highly dependent on trust from the public, to use resources well and to work to prevent crime.

“ Our aim is not to protect our IT environment, but to contribute to protecting vulnerable children.”

Creating bigger impact

Several of the companies mentioned that if an increasing number of companies tackle this issue, then together they will cover a larger part of society, and can have a bigger impact on tackling CSA crime and protecting children.

They say that it should be common practice or the norm to address the issue in both the corporate world, government agencies and in municipalities.

“ It is hard not to be a small part in mitigating this problem. It is as simple as that. Companies have a responsibility, and there are many things that companies can do to improve society in different ways.”

“ We want to contribute to society. We do this for the sake of children and child victims. It is morally right, and care and concern should stretch beyond the boundaries of the company.”

8 MANY STAKEHOLDERS, MANY DRIVERS

Child sexual abuse material (CSAM) in business environments is a complex issue with many stakeholders and many different drivers.

This chapter highlights the main reasons why different stakeholders decide to safeguard IT environments against CSAM, and implement software to address the problem.

Sustainability and corporate social responsibility

The companies concerned here have ethical values at the core of their business, focusing primarily on sustainability, but also Corporate Social Responsibility. Some endeavour to work ethically and for a sustainable future, while others have corporate goals that are focused directly on human rights issues. A few have strategies aimed directly at addressing children's rights.

Sustainability and Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) promotes acting ethically within legal boundaries, but it goes further than that. CSR also concerns identifying issues that are not illegal, but unethical, and creating a framework to make sure that the company acts ethically on those issues, with the end goal of contributing to a better world.

"More and more companies acknowledge that it is important to take responsibility and contribute to make the world better."

Children's rights

The focus of children's rights in sustainability work is typically focused on child labour, however the interviewed companies understand that child sexual abuse (CSA) clearly falls within the issue of children's rights, and believe that acting on the issue aligns well with their ethical values.

"As a big company we have a corporate social responsibility, and a possibility to make a positive impact on society. On the issue of child sexual abuse, we can contribute by preventing and disrupting these crimes as far as it is possible from a business perspective."

Frameworks for sustainability

There are several big frameworks that influence work on sustainability, such as the UN Sustainable Development Goals, the UN Global Compact and UN Declaration of Human Rights, and the World Health Organisation Guidelines on Human Rights. There is also ISO certification 26000, which provides guidelines for businesses and organisations committed to operating in a socially responsible way.

"Child sexual abuse is a child rights issue and we can contribute to the Sustainable Development Goals and to safeguarding children. Therefore it is logical to have this on the agenda."

Demands on suppliers

Another important aspect mentioned by the interviewed companies is the ethical demands that are placed on them by their customers, and that they in turn place on their suppliers, subcontractors, and other stakeholders, as part of the business value chain. Whereas these demands don't specify working against child sexual abuse material (CSAM), they create a drive for companies to make sure that they act decisively within their own organisation.

"Taking steps to ensure that CSAM cannot be distributed or consumed on our IT equipment is a very concrete way to take action that we could not do in any other way."

Another company states that they want to be a sustainable organisation, which includes adhering to human rights, protecting vulnerable groups, and trying to prevent crime. Making sure that their IT equipment cannot be used for illegal activities is a very concrete way to further this cause.

Sustainability reports

The interviewed companies are not unified in their decisions on whether to include detection of CSAM in their sustainability reports or not. A couple of the companies have made the decision to separate the issue from their other sustainability work, and do not mention it. Others do the opposite and clearly state that they are taking action to contribute to the issue and prevent CSA.

Compliance – policy

Corporate policies are frameworks that companies create to set guidelines for how the company and its employees are expected to act. These policies also add ethical guidelines to the legal frameworks provided in the countries in which they operate. To ensure that corporate policies act as successful drivers for compliance, companies must ensure that they adhere to and follow up on the policies which they have put in place.

All the interviewed companies have policies in place that in different ways state that criminal behaviour will not be accepted. The most commonly mentioned policies are IT policies, Codes of Conduct and Sustainability policies.

These are the policies that companies act on when someone has downloaded or viewed illegal material. However, the issue of child sexual abuse material (CSAM) is rarely clearly articulated in the policies. This is most often because companies believe that a general wording about illegal material gives them sufficient grounds to act.

“ We don’t specifically mention what kind of material that is illegal. If we did, we would have to specify all other types of illegal material as well.”

IT policies

IT policies state that it is prohibited to use IT equipment to download or view illegal or inappropriate material. What is considered inappropriate material or websites, typically pornography, gambling, racist or otherwise offensive content, is specified. A description of illegal content is, as mentioned above and with a few exceptions, not articulated.

Code of Conduct

The Code of Conduct is another document that companies use as a framework for acting against CSAM in the business environment. Many Codes of Conduct include human rights, and working against child labour and different types of exploitation of children. Child sexual abuse (CSA) and CSAM are rarely articulated in these Codes of Conduct. However, as the Codes of Conduct are usually written in a way that includes a wider take on child protection, they often work as framework for the issue of CSAM as well.

Sustainability policies

Sustainability policies are often focused on environmental issues, but can also include human rights, such as acting against child labour and exploitation of children. Like the Codes of Conduct they don’t typically mention CSA, however the protection of children usually aligns with the policy.

Policy compliance

After putting ethical policies in place, it is important that companies evaluate their contribution and success. Hence, it is vital that businesses ensure that rules are followed and acted upon.

“ There are not many ethical crimes which are followed up in this manner. But by preventing that company equipment is used for CSAM, companies can feel comfortable that their equipment is not misused in a way that can cause serious harm to children.”

“ My role is to make sure that our employees use our equipment the way that it is meant to, and to act on all misconduct.”

Breach of company policy

A breach of company policy will lead to disciplinary action. When someone is found to have used their work computer to handle CSAM, dismissal is very likely.

The companies all state that if they find evidence of someone handling CSAM on the work computer they will report it to the police. However, in some countries the police do not investigate possession of CSAM. In these cases the company will instead take disciplinary action based upon breach of company policy.

Compliance – risk

More than half of the interviewed companies articulate the need to manage risks associated with criminal behaviour. Unlike ethical drivers, these concern risks which occur if and when employees use company IT equipment to commit crimes. It also involves ensuring that companies have done what they can to manage these risks.

Criminal behaviour of any type is a risk to companies. However, whereas some crimes directly affect businesses, such as bribery or corruption, other crimes have an impact on society rather than directly on businesses. Both child sexual abuse (CSA) crime and environmental crimes, although otherwise very different, are examples of such offences; they often don’t have a direct impact on the company, but are still important to mitigate.

Control measures

Companies have routines and control measures for other types of criminal and problematic behaviour, and it makes sense to have that in place for CSA crime as well. A couple of the companies view putting measures in place to mitigate CSA crime in a business environment as similar to having an insurance.

“ We take measures to prevent all crimes, and this is another step. We don’t want any types of crimes committed on company premises or with the help of company equipment. Downloading or viewing child sexual abuse material on the work computer is without a doubt a crime.”

Problematic behaviour

Several of the interviewed companies draw the conclusion that if someone is prepared to commit a crime using their work computer, then they would probably be prepared to break other laws as well, if they haven’t already. Control measures to identify CSAM is therefore an opportunity to identify other criminal behaviour as well.

“ Someone who exhibits this type of behaviour has probably progressed quite far into building that behaviour, and could have other problematic behaviours as well. This means a risk that the individuals engage in other inappropriate or illegal activities.”

“ You don’t want people who are inclined to commit crimes in a company. If they don’t have a conscience when it comes to this issue, they probably don’t have a conscience when it comes to other issues either.”

Manage the problem

Several companies mention that putting control measures in place to make sure that IT equipment cannot be used to view or download CSAM, means that they have the capacity to manage the problem, and have control of the situation.

“ This is a problem in IT environments and we’re not alone in recognising it. We have had incidents before without having the capacity to follow up and manage the situation.”

IT security

Protection of IT environments to prevent downloading, consumption or sharing of child sexual abuse material (CSAM), is driven by, and heavily focused on, risk. Risks to the IT environment, but also the risk that individuals who partake in this crime pose to the organisation. The latter is further detailed in the section on compliance and risk.

For some organisations, security risks weigh heavily on decisions to protect IT environments from CSAM, for others it is an added bonus, for a few it has not been one of the arguments considered. Notably, organisations from industries that are usually more exposed to IT security threats, as well as other security threats, place more emphasis on this issue.

“ We work in an industry which is very exposed to security threats. If we have individuals that engage in this type of behaviour in our company, then we have a security risk.”

Risky environments

When individuals use IT equipment to download, view or share CSAM, it often exposes devices, and the IT environment, to different types of IT security threats, such as malware, trojans and different types of viruses. It can also leave traces that could lead back to the company.

“ Security was low on the agenda when we decided to protect our IT environment. It was an ethical decision. However, we discovered that when this type of material is handled, it is often also a way in for malware and different types of

viruses. It’s an added bonus that this type of security threat can also be mitigated.”

Another of the interviewed companies highlights that CSAM is often handled on the darknet, which is a space that hosts a lot of other harmful material that individuals might download. This creates a considerable risk for collateral damage.

Layers of protection

The companies state that they need a secure IT environment. They also need to be assured that the IT equipment that they own and provide to employees is not used for illegal purposes. This is why organisations have a range of measures in place, such as firewalls, virus protection, and other limitations. A computer agent that protects against CSAM adds an extra layer of protection.

“ Every limitation of IT security risk is important, and this is a good complement and layer inside of the perimeter protection.”

“ For the IT department this can be seen as any type of virus programme that a company should have installed. It should be a

hygiene factor to have installed, just as programmes that are installed to prevent virus attacks or computers being hacked.”

One of the companies highlights that commonly used security protections don’t work in the same way when people work remotely, and that firewalls only stop traffic to known websites:

“ The agent is always on and always protects the computer, even when it is taken outside of our network.”

Risk of blackmail

Another issue, which a few of the companies mention, is the risk of blackmail, and the fact that it is becoming an increasingly pertinent issue. If someone is found to be handling CSAM, and traced back to the company, they could easily be exposed to blackmail and pose a very real risk to the company.

Accidental exposure

A couple of the interviewed companies also identified a risk that their employees, in particular IT personnel, may accidentally be exposed to CSAM. By making sure that CSAM is identified and flagged in a controlled manner, this can be avoided.

Brand protection

Brand protection and brand building is mentioned by more than half of the interviewed companies, however it is not typically the most important reason why companies choose to address child sexual abuse material (CSAM).

Several of the companies believe that acting on CSAM is a way of taking control of the issue, managing a risk and protecting the brand from potential damage. Some companies also see it as an added possibility to build the brand, either from a sustainability perspective, or as employee/employer branding.

Brand protection

If a CSAM crime becomes public in the media, or if rumours start to circulate in other forums, about how an employee at a company has downloaded, viewed or shared CSAM, it could be very damaging to the company brand. By making sure that companies have done what they can to detect such criminal behaviour, they incur less risk. By being first to know, and to act on the information, companies can manage the situation

and limit damage. It is about ensuring preparedness and making sure that CSAM crime does not take the business by surprise.

“ If we have employees that do this, and that we don’t know about, then it is out of our control.”

“ In one way this may draw attention to the issue, but it means we’re in control of the information and can demonstrate positive action instead of reaction.”

“ This is a criminal activity that we are expected to manage and handle. It is always better to be in control of the information, to be able to say that we were the ones who reported this to the police, and that we take responsibility on this issue.”

Brand building

A few of the companies mention that working to prevent CSAM also has a positive impact on the brand. It is something that shows concrete action towards the Sustainable Development Goals and some companies include it in their sustainability reports.

These companies also highlight that taking action on this issue is typically very positively received by employees, and that it is an action that employees are proud of, which can strengthen the internal brand.

“ Communicating it internally is usually received very positively, it highlights the ethical values in the company and our employees are proud that we do this. Brand building is not the reason why we do this, but it is an added value.”

Human resources

For Human Resources (HR), preventing child sexual abuse is about ensuring that employees share the company's core values, and that they don't engage in criminal behaviour. It is about taking action when employees exhibit problematic behaviour, but it is also about being a good and attractive employer.

Companies are a reflection of larger society, and the companies interviewed all show awareness around the fact that if a problem exists in society, it most likely also exists within their organisation.

For employers it is important to have employees that share their core values, which tie in closely with ethical values, compliance and policy issues. All the interviewed companies emphasise that they cannot have employees that engage in criminal behaviour.

“ It is important for us to be a good employer. We want employees that share our values, function well, and feel safe in the workplace. If we can do simple things like making sure that we don't have employees that consume child sexual abuse material, then I think we should.”

Problematic behaviour

Companies have an obligation to make sure that employees feel safe, and can do their job. This means that it is important to know if employees suffer from debilitating addictions like alcoholism, gambling, or sometimes excessive consumption of pornography. Consumption of child sexual abuse material can also be grouped into this category.

“ If someone searches for child sexual abuse material they are clearly not well and could be a danger to themselves, others and the company. As an employer we need to identify and deal with that.”

“ We want to recruit employees that share our values. If that turns out not to be the case, then it doesn't matter how well that employee delivers and performs. If they do things that are in stark contrast to what we as an employer stand for, then they cannot work here.”

Attractive workplace

Ethical values and taking positive action are also important from the perspective of being an attractive employer, both to current and potential employees. It is important to everyone, but especially to the younger workforce.

“ We want to have the best people employed in our organisation. Making ethical decisions creates value and shows that we as an organisation contribute to society.”

Legal considerations

There is no external legal requirement on companies or organisations to protect their IT environment from child sexual abuse material (CSAM). There are however a number of legal aspects that companies need to consider, and a number of laws that affect an implementation of software to detect CSAM.

Possession of CSAM is a crime defined by the Criminal Code in most countries, and as such should be reported to the police. Reporting to the police is mandatory in some countries.

The fact that CSAM is illegal helps companies drive the necessary internal processes when child sexual abuse is detected in the business IT environment. Committing a criminal act is in most cases a legal reason for termination of employment. That CSAM is illegal also affects company processes in regards to how incidents and the illegal material itself need to be handled. In countries where CSAM is not illegal companies need to rely solely on their internal policies.

Labour laws

When employers have lost confidence in an employee and want to take disciplinary action, or terminate employment, labour laws govern how the case should be handled. These differ greatly between countries. Generally, it is easier to act on illegal actions, such as consumption or downloading of CSAM, compared to inappropriate behaviour, such as viewing pornography, which the company also might want to take action on.

Countries, regions and industries

The legal framework in countries may affect the implementation of software to detect CSAM in IT environments. In most countries such an implementation is

straight forward, however in some countries labour unions have to be consulted, and in a limited number of countries approval by every employee is required.

Although not specific to CSAM, in public sector and government organisations, which are funded by taxpayers, there are external demands on preventing criminal behaviour, and there are also requirements to put processes in place that makes it possible to log, follow up and trace activities.

For operators of essential services and providers of digital services, there are cybersecurity acts generated by the European Union, and the US and Asia, such as the NIS directive, which is an EU wide legislation on cybersecurity.

Another example are the legal demands placed on the financial sector to work to stop criminal networks and financial crimes. While none of these regulations are aimed at CSAM, taking action on this issue can support compliance to these requirements.

GDPR

GDPR is legislation on data protection and privacy in the European Union and the European Economic Area and needs to be considered when installing detection software. One directive is that incident data stored in software that detects CSAM needs to be deleted within certain time frames.

“ GDPR doesn't present any legal obstacles to detecting child sexual abuse material on work computers, however it needs to be considered in our processes.”

“ GDPR put demands on how we handle sensitive information. We therefore have a very limited group of people involved in incidents where employees are suspected of consuming child sexual abuse material.”

Privacy

Irrespective of GDPR, personal privacy and the perceived risk to personal privacy is an issue that is often part of the discussion around detection software.

“ Some people internally were worried about the consequences and saw detection of CSAM as invasion of privacy. However, the only thing this software does it to prevent equipment from being used for illegal activities. How can that be invasion of privacy?”

“ We discussed the issue with the unions, but they didn't have any reservations. Their and our conclusion was that the software does not invade personal privacy, as it only reacts to material classified as illegal by law enforcement. However, we decided that we needed to be open and transparent about the implementation.”

ELAINE WEIDMAN GRUNEWALD
Global Sustainability Executive, and Founder, AI Sustainability Center

SUSTAINABILITY IS A BUSINESS IMPERATIVE

Businesses have committed to ESG (Environmental, Social and Governance) criteria for decades, but this commitment is now more than crucial as SDG challenges are coming to a head. We are rapidly approaching the target date for the SDGs, while facing acute problems such as climate change and the COVID-19 pandemic. Digitalisation is accelerating both challenges and opportunities. As a result, sustainability must be at the core of business strategy and development.

Sustainability starts with a moral imperative, but even more so a business imperative, and a leadership vision that is based on wanting to change the world and the company to be a force for good. This sustainability thinking must penetrate all levels of the organisation, and it must be reliably informed by the challenges we face today.

Protecting human rights

As complex global problems continue to grow, we need more education, more innovation and more action. The climate crisis is at the forefront of the challenges we face today, but the scope of sustainability is much wider than this. Protecting human rights and the rights of the child are a prime example of what we must work towards. This becomes increasingly complex in a digitalised world, and requires stakeholders from all sectors to play an integral part.

The impact of the private sector

I recently co-wrote a book, *Sustainability leadership: A Swedish approach to transforming your company, your industry and your world*, together with Henrik Henriksson, CEO of Scania, because I feel strongly that the private sector needs to step up; with technology, market solutions, and resources. The sheer scale of the private sector, and its ability to respond more quickly than governments, means that it must take a proportionate, if not bigger, share of the responsibility to solve the crises that we are facing today. Today more than two-thirds of the hundred richest entities on the planet are corporations – if we don't engage the private sector and its resources, it is a huge miss.

Innovation and technology

Key to sustainability is technology. You can't innovate without technology, whether you're looking at biodegradable

plastics, ethical risks of AI, or to reduce emissions of truck fleets – it's all about tech and good engineering. To be successful we also need to look at how we get multi-stakeholder solutions together, and how we truly ensure that technology is used for good, and not for exploitative purposes.

Innovation in the area of sustainability is a huge opportunity to develop businesses that are profitable. It attracts top-level employees, who often want to connect to purpose driven businesses, it also attracts customers who want to interact with ethical and purpose driven companies, and investors focusing on ESG issues. The end result is ethically driven businesses who provide resources and opportunities for the communities in which they operate.

Getting the foundation right

Underlining the importance of responsible business practices is especially true when we discuss online child sexual abuse crime. Working to prevent child sexual abuse is about putting a stake in the ground, refusing to be part of a problem, and getting the foundation right. Big tech companies, for example, could do much more on their platforms, by creating technical solutions, and by working towards ensuring, with certainty, that they are not contributing to the problem. This goes for all businesses and organisations.

Transformational tools need to be developed in all areas to accelerate the pace towards a sustainable future. Where they are available, they should be used. Software that detects child sexual abuse material in an IT environment is one such

transformational tool. It protects the IT environment and employees, but it also provides a solution to a societal problem.

Sustainability in the private sector needs to be about proactively addressing what a business can do to improve the world, and how it can be a force for good. It's about embracing sustainability as part of the core strategy, and asking all employees: What can we do? And what should we not do? From a business perspective once you start to contextualise your impacts, and minimise your risks, it starts to make perfect sense. Acting ethically and for a sustainable future will increasingly be key to business success.

Elaine Weidman Grunewald is an expert on global sustainability and development. She has worked with the private sector for two decades, with a focus on digitalisation and sustainable development challenges, and pioneered the concept of Technology for Good. She is the founder of the AI Sustainability Center, and has recently published a book entitled *Sustainability leadership: A Swedish approach to transforming your company, your industry and your world*, which was co-authored with Henrik Henriksson, CEO of Scania.

9 COVID-19 HAS INCREASED REMOTE WORKING

COVID-19 has had an impact on all of the interviewed companies in regards to remote working. Depending on the industry, about thirty to eighty percent of employees have worked from home since the beginning of the pandemic. In some industries only a proportion of employees have been able to work from home. In a few companies all employees have worked from home.

In most of the interviewed companies a large part of the workforce were working from home in the beginning of the pandemic, in March, April, May and June. In August and September, the workforce in a majority of the companies were working part time from home and part time at the office. There is a consensus that the change to remote work has worked surprisingly well, and has been largely unproblematic.

“ Almost everybody, with just a few exceptions, have been working from home.”

“ The change to remote work has worked very well, if anything we have almost seen an increase in effectiveness.”

Increased demands

Many positive effects are generated by working from home, such as work-life balance, reduced commuting, less need for expensive office space etc. However, there are also negative

effects, like compliance risks and IT security risks. These increased risks place new demands on companies.

“ There are more challenges and more demands in a world where we work remotely, which leads to a need to have more control measures in place.”

Increase in compliance risk

Several of the companies highlight that working remotely generally increases the compliance and IT security risks. Compliance risks increase outside of the corporate culture, with distance and less social control, and it is easier to commit crimes in the home environment than in the office environment. The companies also identified a risk that addictions, such as alcoholism or gambling, can get worse when working from home.

“ The internal controls are clearer when sitting together in the office.”

“ When people break habits and experience increased pressure and stress, that can also increase negative behaviour.”

“ We have seen an increased risk for corruption and ethical violations, and we have also seen a considerable increase in theft reports.”

IT security risks

Regarding IT security there is a risk that employees are less careful and security conscious in the home environment. It is also a less controlled IT environment, which means that it is easier to circumvent firewalls and other protection. Some companies have seen an increase in external cyber-attacks.

Risk related to CSAM

Most of the interviewed individuals say that there could be an increased risk that work IT equipment is used to download or consume child sexual abuse material (CSAM) when more employees work from home.

“ The situation with many employees working from home can increase the risk that individuals who handle this type of material have more privacy and time to do so.”

There are also a number of factors which may work to decrease risk, or leave it unchanged. Some interviewees say that the social world at home, with other family members, and limited private space, could decrease the risk. Others mention that with less business travel, the risk could decrease. Working from home also means that individuals may have access to private devices, which might decrease how much company IT equipment is used to view or download CSAM. Others say that risks have remained stable. That either a person has this interest or not.

Actual incidents

The companies differ in whether they have seen an actual increase in CSAM related incidents or not. A few of the respondents have seen an increase in

incidents, but the majority of respondents have not seen an increase.

“ Working from home means an increased risk. We’ve had more incidents than we otherwise have, which is what we expected.”

“ We have had some incidents, but not more than we usually have. Theoretically it should go up, we know that employees do this during their working hours and at home they have more possibilities than in the workplace.”

“ We have not seen an increase in incidents. Perhaps it is more difficult to find the time and space to watch such material at home.”

Future of remote work

All of the interviewed companies say that they think there will be a bigger tolerance towards working from home when the pandemic ends. Only one person intimated that they will

probably go back to operating the same as before. All other companies say that they will continue to work from home, and probably to a fairly high degree.

“ I don’t think we will go back to how it was. We had to develop a new infrastructure that we now have in place, and it works well. I think we will end up in a new world where a majority of our employees work sometimes from home, sometimes in office.”

“ I think it will become norm to work from home much more than before. I think employees will demand the possibility, and there are many positive aspects for both employee and employer.”

ANNA BORGSTRÖM
CEO, NetClean

ETHICAL COMPANIES NEED TO LEAD THE WAY

If 2020 has taught us anything, it is that we are living in a global world with global challenges. The Corona virus has spread rapidly to every corner and echelon of society, and I can't help but think that it helps illustrate how online child sexual abuse (CSA) has permeated the internet. It is a huge problem everywhere.

I was very pleased, but slightly surprised, when reading through the interviews for this part of the NetClean Report. I was expecting more diverse answers from the participants, who represent different departments in different companies, and different drivers as to why they address the risk of child sexual abuse material (CSAM) in their organisations.

IT might list 'protection of the IT environment', at the top, and Compliance, 'Brand protection', but almost everyone that NetClean spoke to pointed primarily to a desire to operate ethically, and many said that incorporating existing tangible solutions to detect CSAM chimed well with the company's values and strategies.

Not an isolated problem

I have heard company representatives describe it as a 'no brainer', once they engage with the issue and decide to work proactively. However, bringing the idea of installing software to detect CSAM to a company is not always as easy as the moral issue is clear. It affects IT, HR, Compliance, Legal, Sustainability and general leadership. This is why companies that have ethical values and sustainability thinking, and view society as a stakeholder as part

of their core strategies, have an easier time doing this. I believe this makes these companies champions and their attitude towards ethical values and sustainability should be celebrated.

However, we still have a long way to go. Online CSA continues to be a growing problem that is not discussed openly enough. Too many businesses see it as an isolated problem, and don't incorporate it into their core strategical work. Too many businesses are not aware of the problem at all, or decide not to address it because they do not want to be associated with this type of crime.

Data from our NetClean Report 2018 shows that CSAM can be found on 1 in 500 work computers. With these types of numbers we need to ensure that businesses are openly aware of the problem; how it affects their IT, the reputation of the business, and the huge potential they have in aiding law enforcement by passing on information.

Complex problems deserve robust responses

We must shine a light on this problem and work together to prevent it. Especially now that COVID-19 has

seen many people working from home. This in itself has brought new aspects to IT security. Companies need to look at how they secure IT equipment in this new environment, and while IT work to secure it, all stakeholders in the company should unify to ensure that the technology that is owned by the company and used by employees does not facilitate CSA.

It's an ethical stand that companies and their employees can be proud of. And, it is these types of companies that attract the brightest and best employees, and so protecting the next generation of employees is an ethical standpoint that favours the businesses.

Based on the interviews I am hopeful that engaged companies will continue to incorporate software that detects CSAM, push the issue further up on agendas and into their core business. All complex global problems, from environmental risks to safeguarding children online, need and deserve robust responses, and with the resources and the power of the private industry, businesses are uniquely placed to provide this response and be a force for good.

ACTING ON A PROBLEM COMPANIES DON'T KNOW THEY HAVE

In these interviews, none of the individuals who represented the companies had previously had the issue of child sexual abuse material (CSAM) on work computers on the agenda. Nor was it a standard issue that they were expected to act on. This was only something that they had engaged with in their current employment or after coming into contact with NetClean.

"It is not something that we have ever had on the agenda before. It has not been part of any risk assessments, like bribery and corruption, and did not feature as an IT security issue either."

A majority of the interviewed individuals had never come into contact with the issue before in a work-related context. Several mentioned that pornography usage is the closest they've come to the subject.

"I have come across heavy pornography users as a security officer, but not child sexual abuse material."

"I had not come into contact with this before. What has been on the agenda is the use of pornography."

Six of the interviewed individuals said that they have either been aware of or involved in working with incidents of child sexual abuse or CSAM in the work environment before. However, all those cases have been seen and treated as isolated incidents.

"I had heard about isolated incidents before, but they've always been seen as exceptions. Child sexual abuse material was not on our agenda before."

"I had heard about it happening, but I had never been directly involved."

CONCLUSION

IT IS DIFFICULT TO GRASP THE SCALE OF CSA CRIME, HOWEVER IT IS EASY TO UNDERSTAND THAT WE MUST GALVANISE A RESPONSE

Anna Borgström, CEO, NetClean

The year 2020 was a shock to the system. Nobody could imagine what would follow when we raised our glasses to the new year back in December 2019. My hopes for 2021, are that we get to grips with the pandemic and the spread of the coronavirus. But, even if we reach this goal, it is clear that we will have to deal with the fallout from the pandemic for years to come.

Many have lost close ones, and even if we have not, everyone has been affected by lockdowns, travel restrictions and social distancing. And when the world turned its attention to fighting the virus, we who work to stop child sexual abuse (CSA) crime had to find an even stronger focus and drive to make sure that the safeguarding of children stayed, and stays, a priority even when so many other concerns draw on our attention.

We have to act now

We have not yet conquered the pandemic, and it is still too early to draw major conclusions from the fallout that it generated. It is, however, not too early to investigate the challenges and risks that the pandemic has imposed on vulnerable children. Children in lockdown and under social restrictions are suffering now, so we have to act on the indications that state that children are at increased risk.

The vital findings in this year's report are the differences between how countries have prioritised CSA crime, how they have responded to the pandemic, and how it has influenced police officers' capacity to work on crimes against children. This report shows that closed schools and lockdowns have increased the risk of children being sexually abused, and governments and policy makers must consider these findings if and when, during this pandemic or in the future, they plan for future school closures and lockdowns.

And while we rely on governments and policy makers to work in the best interest of children, we have to ensure that all stakeholders in our societies contribute to fighting CSA crime. We all need to work incredibly hard. We need engagement, stamina and compassion, along with what I always advocate - collaboration and the use of effective technology.

All the pieces need to come together

It is difficult to grasp the scale of CSA crime, however it is easy to understand that we must galvanise a response. Think of it as a giant puzzle where everyone must collaborate to form a full picture.

Law enforcement forms a huge part here, and we are extremely grateful to all the law enforcement professionals who contributed with their knowledge and expertise to this report.

Another part of this puzzle is private industry and public sector employers, who with technology can help detect and report material that they find. Their part in this picture is vital, and we are equally grateful to those from these sectors who took the time to speak to us and share their insights into the discussions, thinking and processes behind why a business decides to work to stop the spread of child sexual abuse material (CSAM), the revictimisation of children, and to safeguard children by reporting CSAM to law enforcement.

Tech4Good

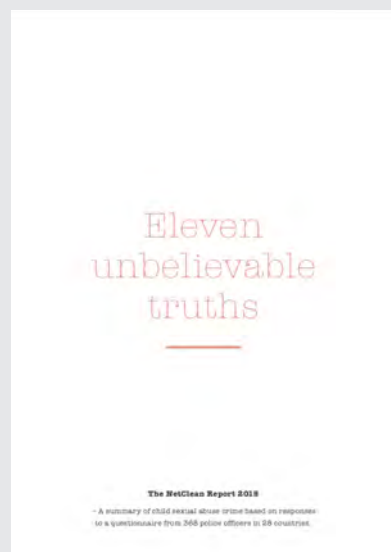
At NetClean, we are big advocates of ethical leadership and the importance of incorporating ethical thinking and strategies into the core of a business. Businesses have the resources, power and sometimes sheer size to be a force for good, and to lead on positive developments in the world. This is why Tech4Good is so important. This year's report really showed how much some businesses are invested in this issue, and it really made me very pleased.

Pleased that more businesses are now starting to understand that a simple tangible action can mean so much. By ensuring that IT equipment used by employees cannot be used to download, consume and distribute CSAM, employers can stop criminal activity, keep their IT environment clean, and help protect and safeguard children.

Thank you for reading this report. It is important that we talk about what is happening now, and even though we cannot draw any major conclusions from the data that we collected, we must act on the indications that we have seen. It is clear that the pandemic has affected both the real world and the online world. For perpetrators it has been a perfect storm, but in many places law enforcement agencies have seen this and responded quickly. It is also so positive to see that the private sector is starting to talk about the work that they do to tackle CSAM crime. Here's to a better 2021!

READ AND DOWNLOAD THE NETCLEAN REPORTS

The NetClean Report – COVID-19 IMPACT 2020 is the sixth annual report about child sexual abuse crime produced by NetClean.
All reports can be read and downloaded from www.netclean.com



NETCLEAN REPORT 2015

Focus: A more general overview of the development of child sexual abuse crime.



NETCLEAN REPORT 2016

Focus: Distribution patterns, such as file sharing, social media platforms, searches for CSAM on the open internet, and CSAM stored on work computers.

Also insights on: Where the children in CSAM are geographically located, the size of CSAM investigations, increased awareness of female offenders, and victim ID and law enforcement challenges.



NETCLEAN REPORT 2017

Focus: Whether there is such a thing as a typical offender, the correlation between viewing CSAM and committing hands-on abuse, and how hands-on offenders come into contact with children.

Also insights on: Search patterns for CSAM on the open internet, size of CSAM investigations, technological developments which affect CSA crime and investigations, and increased use of chat rooms and apps.

Additional insight: Seven accounts detailing how different parts of society fight the dissemination of CSAM.



NETCLEAN REPORT 2018

Focus: Self-produced material; from innocent family photos that were taken without any sexual intent, but ended up in collections of CSAM, to grooming and children being sexually extorted.

Also insights on: Organised offenders, cryptocurrencies, manipulated and hidden images, and deep fakes.

Business Insight: Child sexual abuse crime in the workplace.



NETCLEAN REPORT 2019

Focus: Livestreamed child sexual abuse; the spread of livestreamed CSA, insight into the victims and offenders of livestreamed CSA.

Also insights into: How CSAM is stored, apps and platforms used to store and distribute CSAM, emerging technologies that affect CSA crime.

Business insight: Businesses' use of policies, action plans and technologies to protect the business IT environment from CSAM.

Additional insight: Overview of technologies used to tackle child sexual abuse material in business environments.

ABOUT NETCLEAN

NetClean develops world-leading technology solutions that protect business IT environments against child sexual abuse material, with the aim of creating a brighter future for children. Our solutions protect both work computers and business mobile devices, and are used in more than 110 countries by both multinational corporations, government agencies and public sector organisations.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We would like to extend our gratitude to the 470 police officers who participated in our research and took the time to share their knowledge and expertise with us. The work that you do is invaluable and life changing for all children who are safeguarded as a result.

We would also like to direct a big thank you to the individuals interviewed for the business insight section, for taking the time to share your expertise and insight to provide us with a better understanding of the drivers that lead you to address child sexual abuse material in corporate environments.

We want to thank our sister company Griffeye, for asking their customers to participate in the law enforcement survey on our behalf, and to the law enforcement agencies and officers who helped distribute the survey in their networks.

Finally, we would like to extend a special thanks to the experts who have added their thoughts and insights into how the COVID-19 pandemic has affected child sexual abuse. You provide us with the opportunity to contextualise and bring further meaning to our research.

Thank you!

NetClean.