Victims of online sexual abuse-Forensic interviews and experiences with the legal systems: A bibliography

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Scope

Publications listed are English language international publications on forensic interviews and legal system experiences of victims of online minor sex trafficking and sexual exploitation.

Organization

Publications are divided into two sections. Section one covers forensic interviews with alleged victims of online sexual exploitation. Section two covers victim experiences in legal systems. Publications are listed in date-descending order within each section. Links are provided to open access publications.

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A bibliography

Forensic interviews

Dianiska, R. E., Luna, S., Winks, K. M., Quas, J. A., & Redlich, A. D. (2023). [Current investigator practices and beliefs on interviewing trafficked minors](). *Psychology, Public Policy, and Law, 29(*1), 32-45. DOI:10.1037/law0000378

Despite significant increases in attention during the past 2 decades to the problem of sex trafficking, especially of minors, little is known about how investigators identify, engage, and ultimately question suspected victims. Here we address this gap by surveying investigators in the United States about their interactions with and beliefs about minor trafficking victims. Local, state, and federal law enforcement investigators and related legal professionals (N = 148) completed an online questionnaire about their current practices and challenges they face when identifying and interviewing suspected minor victims of trafficking; their knowledge surrounding youth, sex trafficking, and interviewing; and factors believed to be important to the successful prosecution of traffickers. Common indicators of sex trafficking reported by respondents included the victim's background and behavior during an interview and physical corroboration. Frequent challenges included the minor's previous interactions with authorities and their relationship to the trafficker. Finally, victim disclosure and corroborating physical evidence were believed to be most important for successful prosecution. Results have policy and training implications regarding methods of improving identification and prosecution of traffickers. (PsycInfo Database Record © 2023 APA, all rights reserved)

Luna, S., Dianiska, R. E., Winks, K. M., Redlich, A. D., & Quas, J. A. (2023). Examining investigator strategies for questioning suspected minor victims of sex trafficking. *Journal of Police and Criminal Psychology, 38*(4), 813-825.

Law enforcement's ability to obtain accurate and complete disclosures from trafficked minors is crucial for the identification of victims and prosecution of perpetrators. Yet, little is known about how this population is questioned by investigators. The purpose of this study was to assess the techniques and approaches investigators endorse to question suspected minor sex trafficking

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victims who vary in age and cooperativeness. Individuals across the USA with experience investigating sex trafficking cases were recruited to complete an online survey about their experiences and perceptions related to interviewing suspected minor trafficking victims. Participants (N = 189) were asked to read four hypothetical scenarios that described suspected sex trafficking victims of varying ages (13 vs. 17) and cooperativeness (high vs. low) and to select the interviewing techniques they would employ. Interviewing techniques were categorized into witness-focused, suspect-focused, and a mix of victim/suspect techniques. A mixed-model ANOVA was conducted to determine if investigators varied their endorsement of techniques based on victim age and cooperativeness. Investigators recognized and changed their techniques based on victim age. However, this was primarily the case when victims were cooperative. When victims were in the low cooperativeness condition, investigators reported they would use similar techniques with the 13- and 17-year-old victims. Our findings provide insight into how investigators approach suspected victims of varying ages and cooperativeness. More research is needed on how techniques used to question suspected victims with these and other characteristics actually impact disclosures and disclosure reluctance.

Gemara, N., Cohen, N., & Katz, C. (2022). "I do not remember… You are reminding me now!":
    Children's difficult experiences during forensic interviews about online sexual
    solicitation. *Child Abuse & Neglect, 134*. DOI:10.1016/j.chiabu.2022.105913

Forensic interviews for children who have undergone online sexual solicitation (OSS) constitute a unique setting compared to other forms of child sexual abuse (CSA). In these cases, the interviewer holds concrete evidence of the abuse in the form of pictures or texts. During the interview, interviewers use these materials to advance the data collection regarding the abuse, a practice that may significantly influence the child's wellbeing. The current study aims to explore children's experiences during forensic interviews concerning OSS. The sample included 20 Jewish children in Israel who were referred to and participated in a forensic investigation. A thematic qualitative methodology was used to analyze the children's narratives. The findings demonstrate the children's difficulties when confronted with materials related to the abuse. The children detailed the different ways the interview challenged their wellbeing, including visualizing and verbalizing the abuse, new insights, and being videotaped. The findings in the current study emphasized the intrinsic

challenges that children face in OSS forensic interviews resulting from the tension between the interviewer's need to collect details about the abuse and the child's desire to forget it. Practical ramifications pertaining to these threats to the child's wellbeing, future recommendations, and limitations of the study will be discussed.

Katz, C., Piller, S., Glucklich, T., & Matty, D. E. (2021). "Stop waking the dead": Internet child sexual abuse and perspectives on its disclosure. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence, 36*(9-10), NP5084-NP5104. DOI:10.1177/0886260518796526

The phenomenon of Internet child sexual abuse (ICSA) has been receiving growing attention over the last decade, and studies have promoted knowledge with respect to the phenomenon's epidemiology, as well as to characteristics of the victims, perpetrators, and dynamics in these cases. The current retrospective study sought to delve into the disclosure component in cases of ICSA. The sample comprised 52 cases of adolescents who arrived at a child advocacy center (CAC) following ICSA. Analysis of these cases was targeted to capture the multifaceted nature of disclosure using those perspectives that could be documented by the CAC staff—of the practitioners, the adolescents, and their parents. Beyond the descriptive results regarding the victims and the nature of the abuse, the case analyses illustrate the disclosure process as experienced by the various parties involved, highlighting the challenging nature of this aspect of the phenomenon. For the parents, the disclosure experience can perhaps be best epitomized by the expression that was heard repeatedly—"Stop waking the dead"—an expression that indicated their wish to bring the subject to a close. The difficulty in disclosing such incidents was also illustrated by the fact that 20 children in the current sample were reluctant to collaborate during the CAC process. In fact, according to these data, most of the incidents were revealed following a police investigation rather than by a disclosure initiated by the children themselves. Focusing on this specific aspect of ICSA—that is, disclosure—enables a new perspective on it and stresses the need to further study it in such cases. A better understanding of the disclosure experience as it pertains to the individuals involved in cases of ICSA may improve and help modify future prevention and intervention efforts in the field.

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Lavoie, J., Dickerson, K. L., Redlich, A. D., & Quas, J. A. (2019). Overcoming disclosure reluctance in youth victims of sex trafficking: New directions for research, policy, and practice. *Psychology, Public Policy, and Law, 25*(4), 225-238. DOI:10.1037/law0000205

An alarming number of youth worldwide are victims of commercial sexual exploitation, particularly sex trafficking. Normative developmental processes and motivations across the adolescent period—the age when youth are at greatest risk for trafficking—combined with their history, make them highly likely to be reluctant to disclose their exploitation to police, who often encounter victims because they are suspected of delinquency and crime and who interrogate the victims as suspects. Little scientific and policy attention has been devoted to understanding how to question these victims in a way that reduces their disclosure reluctance and increases their provision of legally relevant information. In the current review, we describe research concerning trafficking victims' histories and exploitative experiences, juvenile suspects' and victims' encounters with the legal system, and best-practice forensic interviewing approaches to elicit disclosures from child victims. We highlight the implications of these areas for understanding the dynamics between how police encounter and interact with adolescent trafficking victims and whether and how the victims disclose trafficking details during these interactions. We close with an agenda for research to test interviewing methods for suspected victims of sex trafficking and with policy and practice recommendations for interviewers.

Lindholm, J., Cederborg, A. C., & Alm, C. (2015). Adolescent girls exploited in the sex trade: Informativeness and evasiveness in investigative interviews. *Police Practice and Research, 16*(3), 197-210. DOI:10.1080/15614263.2014.880839

This study explores the informativeness of 24 adolescents exploited in sex trade in Sweden when they were interviewed by police officers about their experiences. The questions and responses were analysed using coding types developed for research on forensic interviews. Qualitative analyses of the questions resulting in evasive responses and the court files were also done. The findings show that the adolescents were informative yet evasive, specifically when asked open questions. Experiences of violence and interviews conducted soon after the police intervention may result in higher levels of evasiveness. Concurrently, evasiveness seems to be intimately connected to unique circumstances in each case.

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Katz, C. (2013). Internet-related child sexual abuse: What children tell us in their testimonies. *Children and Youth Services Review, 35*(9), 1536-1542. DOI:10.1016/j.childyouth.2013.06.006

Communication technologies are an essential part of our daily social life; however, they also result in a rapid increase in the phenomenon of child sexual abuse through the Internet. Studies that were conducted on this issue mainly focused on the offenders' profile and prevention strategies. The aim of the current paper is to characterize the narratives of alleged victims of child sexual abuse using the testimonies of twenty children who were referred to investigative interviews following suspected sexual abuse through the Internet. Of these twenty children, eight children were reluctant to provide allegations even though external evidence indicated a high possibility that abuse had occurred. Twelve other children provided narratives in response to open-ended invitations. Intensive thematic analysis revealed five key categories: the suspect's grooming process, the offline meeting, "he can do anything", the secret, and the dynamic between the children and the interviewers. The conclusions of the study indicated the emotional state of the children, the dynamic with the perpetrators and its uniqueness, the clinical and the forensic process and prevention.

Choi, K. S., & Lee, H. (2023). The trend of online child sexual abuse and exploitations: A profile of online sexual offenders and criminal justice response. *Journal of Child Sexual Abuse*, 1-20. DOI:10.1080/10538712.2023.2214540

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the number of technology-facilitated crimes against children worldwide has increased substantially and become one of the most serious crime problems. Due to these considerations, there is a lack of large-scale systematic reviews investigating Cybercrime in and of itself could be challenging to investigate in comparison to traditional ones due to the elusiveness of the cyber realm. Specifically, investigating internet crimes against children comes with specific challenges. These offenses target vulnerable children who are less likely to realize their victimization, lowering the probability of reporting to the proper authorities. With these obstacles in mind, this research study utilizes data information regarding the characteristics of online CSAM users and their practices to inform law enforcement, parents, and the public for preventative and strategic purposes. Furthermore, this study diagnoses the significant challenges of investigating technology-facilitated crimes against children by examining how the current criminal justice system responds to these incidents. The policy recommendations discussed offer a holistic lens for highlighting this critical issue and implementing practical and proactive training solutions for law enforcement and the public.

Rahayu, S., Monalisa, M., Monita, Y., & Sugiharto, M. (2022). Legal protection for children in cases of online sexual abuse: A comparative study. *Jambe Law Journal, 5*(1), 81-122. DOI:10.22437/jlj.5.1.81-122

The advancement of technology has provided numerous benefits to society. However, they also proved to yield negative consequences, such as the increase in criminal activities, including online sexual offenses against children which adversely impact children around the world. Legal regulations in Indonesia are still not optimal and require improvements in order to provide better protection for children in Indonesia. In response to the high level of violence against children in Indonesia, President Joko Widodo issued the Presidential Regulation regarding the national strategy for the elimination of violence against children on July 15, 2022, which includes the

provision of the policy, regulatory implementation, and law enforcement. To support the elimination of sexual violence against minors, this study seeks to provide ideas and concepts for improving Indonesia's criminal law. Employing a descriptive research design and a comparative legal research method, with the assistance of literature studies, the researchers drew comparisons of legal regulations and policies addressed to eradicate online sexual offenses against children between Indonesia, the United Kingdom, the Philippines, and Ghana. Based on the findings, this study formulates seven ways to improve legal protection for children against online sexual offenses in Indonesia through repressive and preventive means.

Joleby, M., Landström, S., Lunde, C., & Jonsson, L. S. (2021). Experiences and psychological health among children exposed to online child sexual abuse–a mixed methods study of court verdicts. *Psychology, Crime & Law, 27*(2), 159-181.
DOI: 10.1080/1068316X.2020.1781120

Cases of online child sexual abuse (OCSA) are increasing dramatically in number, but research on this relatively new type of crime and its psychological consequences is limited, leading to major challenges for the judiciary. The present mixed methods study investigated 98 legal cases of OCSA (children aged 7–17 years, M = 12.3, SD = 1.92) in Swedish District Courts to see if and how children's experiences and psychological health were described in the written verdicts. The results revealed that the children's psychological health was mentioned in less than half (48.0%) of the cases. Thematic analyses identified several potential vulnerability factors (e.g. poor psychological health, low self-esteem, loneliness) and several potential psychological consequences (e.g. psychological suffering, self-harming and/or suicidal behavior, internalized self-loathing, impaired relationships) among the children, all of which were similar to what research has shown among victims of offline CSA. The sexual abuse situation was often perceived as threatening, and many children felt that they had no other choice than to comply. In addition, the sexually abusive act was depicted as distressing and sometimes painful. In light of these findings, we suggest that OCSA should not be viewed as essentially different or less severe than offline CSA.

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Tomkins, K. (2021). Stop revictimization in the justice system: Human trafficking survivors are victims too. *Seattle Journal of Social Justice, 20*, 783.

This comment will discuss what human trafficking is and the types of criminal convictions human trafficking victims face. Second, this comment will discuss the effect these criminal convictions have on human trafficking victims, from getting a job to housing, and the current state of human trafficking vacatur laws within Washington. Lastly, this comment will propose a new strategy for decreasing the revictimization of human trafficking victims by amending Washington House Bill 1292 to remove restrictions on utilizing the vacating statute, to create an application-free vacating system, to cover all non-violent crimes, and to add a CLE/CJE (Continuing Legal Education/ Continuing Judicial Education) human trafficking training requirement.

Voziki, V. (2021). [Cyber-enabled child sexual exploitation and sexual abuse: Fighting for children's dignity and safety.](#)

This thesis explores the topic of the online child sexual exploitation and abuse (OCSEA) given the dramatic changes brought by information and communication technologies. It primarily examinesthe type of the offences criminalized under the international and European legal framework as well as the legislative and practical preventive responses for combating such egregious phenomenon. In particular, it critically analyses the agreed definitions concerning the OCSEA based on the 'Luxembourg Guidelines', portraying a better understanding of the relevant offences. Preventive legislative responses are thoroughly explained in combination with a comparative analysis of the UNCRC, the OPSC, the Lanzarote Convention and the Directive 2011/93/EU, mainly indicating how the said instruments complement and strengthen each other. International and European practical responses are equally analyzed, including the work of Interpol and both CoE and EU strategies serving as pivotal catalysts for the establishment of concerted efforts towards a holistic protection of the child-victim. Further, the present study underscores the need of putting an end to the perception of impunity by highlighting the importance of the retrieval of the illicit material depicting children and the identification of both the victims and the sexual predators. Similarly, it stresses that states should prioritize the implementation of the respective legal framework, providing specialized and long-term support for child-victims, by strengthening awareness policies and facilitating access to justice for children. Lastly, it points out the need of

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strategic private sector commitment, multi-sectoral collaboration as well as sustained education focusing on the digital rights of the child aimed at ensuring children's dignity and safety in the cyberspace.

Munro-Kramer, M., Beck, D., Choi, K., Singer, R., Gebhard, A., & Carr, B. (2020). Human trafficking victim's service needs and outcomes: An analysis of clinical law data. *Journal of Human Trafficking, 6*(1), 95-108. DOI:10.1080/23322705.2019.1574476

Human trafficking is a human rights violation occurring around the world. Despite the profound social, health, and economic consequences of this crime, there is a lack of research about the prevalence and needs of human trafficking victims. The purpose of this study is to describe the healthcare, social service, and legal needs of human trafficking victims seeking services at the University of Michigan Human Trafficking Clinic. A secondary analysis of the University of Michigan Human Trafficking Clinic closed case files from 2009-2016 was performed. Data were extracted from the legal files to create a database and data analyses were completed using descriptive frequencies, logistic, and linear regression. Data were extracted from 65 closed cases made up of 49 female victims (75.4%) and 16 male victims (24.6%) between the ages of 13 and 68 years old (M=30.15). Victims had experienced labor (56.9%) and sex (47.7%) trafficking. Logistic regression modeling indicated that trafficking experiences significantly influenced posttrafficking mental healthcare, social service, and legal needs. Victims of human trafficking have extensive needs; however, there are many barriers to seeking and receiving comprehensive services. In order to serve this vulnerable population, collaboration between disciplines must occur.

Rahayu, D., & Fatoni, S. (2019). Commercial sexual exploitation of children: An effort of handling and legal protection. *Yustisia Jurnal Hukum, 8*(2), 330-353.

This article aimed to analyze a significant efforts to protect and prevent a commercially sexual exploitation of children (hereinafter abbreviated to CSEC). There are many child trafficking in border areas and cities as happened in Surabaya, which are identified as sending, transit and destination cities. The research type used is the juridically empirical study, namely the effectiveness research of regulations enforcement on the child protection. Primary data obtained

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from victim experience, such as: children and the family, law enforcement, government, and companion. Non Governmental Organization (hereinafter abbreviated to NGO). Data collection techniques carried out by the interview method and Focus Discussion Group. The results showed that the commercial sexual exploitation of children is an act of human trafficking because the objectives of the sexual action is to obtain money or other goods with the children, sex service users, liaison and related parties. The highest educated victims of the commercially Sexual Exploitation of Children (CSEC) consist of high school students and child having an economically inadequate condition, broken home family, and the influence of uncontrolled social media.

Villacampa, C., & Torres, N. (2019). Human trafficking for criminal exploitation: Effects suffered by victims in their passage through the criminal justice system. *International Review of Victimology, 25*(1), 3-18. DOI:10.1177/0269758018766161

The victim-centred approach to human trafficking emphasises the protection of victims and respect for their rights. For this protection to be effective, victims must be treated as such in their passage through the criminal justice system, which can be complex with forms of trafficking that are still relatively unknown, such as trafficking for criminal exploitation. Based on 37 in-depth interviews with Spanish practising criminal justice and victim assistance services professionals, this paper analyses the effects that the failure to identify these types of victims has on them as they make their way through the criminal justice system, paying particular attention to the degree to which the aforementioned professionals recognise the principle of non-punishment.

Dushi, D. (2018). Challenges of protecting children from sexual abuse and exploitation on the internet: The case of Kosovo. International Review of Law, Computers & Technology, 32(1), 80-98. DOI:10.1080/13600869.2018.1431871

This study includes a vertical analysis of the legal framework regarding the sexual abuse and exploitation of children on the internet. It starts with the examination of the international legal instruments for then continuing with the legislation of Kosovo by evaluating its compliance with these international legal standards in the fight against online sexual exploitation of children while trying to draw recommendations for future development. Finally, the paper includes an empirical part based on interviews with law enforcement. Detecting sexual exploitation of children on the

internet is not as easy as detecting offline sexual exploitation. There are no available statistics on the scale of online child sexual abuse in Kosovo, but it is well-known among law-enforcement agents that a large gap exists between the number of reported cases and the actual cases. This discrepancy happens for various reasons and factors which will be further explained in this paper through the analyses of the interviews conducted with the prosecutors and investigators of Kosovo in charge of the investigation of child sexual abuse and sexual exploitation cases.

Acar, K. V. (2016). Sexual extortion of children in cyberspace. *International Journal of Cyber Criminology, 10*(2), 110-126. DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.163398/

This paper examines Sexual Extortion of Children in Cyberspace (SECC), which has gained notoriety despite the fact that it has recently emerged, and is also considered one of the most significant online threats to children in 2015 Internet Organized Crime Threat Assessment (IOCTA) report of Europol. After the characteristics and frequently-observed modus operandi of SECC are described, the points of differentiation and overlap between SECC and other related concepts about online child sexual abuse will be examined. Then, the constituent elements of SECC will be identified and explained in detail; later, possible prevention strategies and research areas will be discussed individually for each one. However, whether SECC should be defined as a separate criminal act and the legal conditions of punishment in the current criminal law systems are completely ignored.

Andrevski, H., Larsen, J. J., & Lyneham, S. (2013). Barriers to trafficked persons' involvement in criminal justice proceedings: An Indonesian case study. *Trends and Issues in Crime and Criminal Justice,* (451), 1-7.

The clandestine nature of people trafficking means that persons who have been trafficked are often the only ones able to verify the details of the crime, particularly in relation to the exploitation they have experienced (David 2008a). As a result, they tend to be heavily relied upon to provide evidence in prosecutions. Yet trafficked persons have often endured severe trauma and/or exploitation, which may influence their ability or willingness to be involved in the investigation and prosecution of the perpetrator. Further, fear of traffickers and the stigma associated with being a trafficked person, a fear of re-victimisation and lack of trust in the criminal justice system have

all been identified as barriers to victim participation in the investigation and prosecution of cases. These factors are not confined to any one country or region; however, they can be exacerbated by ineffective or inadequate legislation and/or corruption within governments and criminal justice systems. Further, where trafficked persons do not have access to adequate support, treatment and protection, they may be less likely to participate in criminal proceedings.

Reid, J. A. (2013). Rapid assessment exploring impediments to successful prosecutions of sex traffickers of US minors. *Journal of Police and Criminal Psychology, 28*, 75-89. DOI:10.1007/s11896-012-9106-6

Critical psychological, systemic, and legislative barriers to the successful prosecution of child sex traffickers who exploit U.S. citizens were uncovered during a rapid assessment conducted in a U.S. metropolitan region considered a high intensity child prostitution area. Information obtained during 34 face-to-face interviews with criminal justice professionals most likely to encounter child sex trafficking victims was supported by the collection of supplementary quantitative data. Findings revealed complex psychological factors that deter victim participation in prosecutions of traffickers such as child victims' denial of exploitation, trauma bonding between victims and traffickers, and frequent flight and revictimization. Existing inadequacies within the criminal justice system were found that may contribute to child sex trafficking persisting as a low risk/high reward crime.

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Implementing the Barnahus Quality Standards throughout Europe

PROMISE is supporting Europe to adopt the Barnahus model as a standard practice for providing child victims and witnesses of violence rapid access to justice and care. We undertake this work to fulfil the PROMISE vision: a Europe where all children enjoy their right to be protected from violence.

A Barnahus provides multi-disciplinary and interagency collaboration to ensure that child victims and witnesses of violence benefit from a child-friendly, professional and effective response in a safe environment which prevents (re)traumatisation. With the formal support from national authorities, PROMISE provides opportunities to translate national commitment into action and engage internationally in the process. In addition, regular networking and strategic communications continually activate our growing network of professionals and stakeholders who are committed to introducing and expanding Barnahus services nationally.

The first PROMISE project (2015-2017) set European standards and engaged a broad network of professionals. The second PROMISE project (2017-2019) promoted national level progress towards meeting the standards and formalised the PROMISE Barnahus Network. The third project (2020-2022) expanded these activities to include University training, case management tools, with a view to establishing a European Competence Centre for Barnahus and laying the groundwork for an accreditation system for Barnhaus. The current Project: PROMISE ELPIS (2023-2025) is managed by Charité-University Medicine, Berlin, and promotes multidisciplinary and interagency models for child victims and witnesses of sexual violence, with a specific focus on specialised interventions and excellence in practice in cases where there is a presumed online element of the sexual violence.

Access the PROMISE tools and learn more at www.barnahus.eu