

Review Article

Understanding Child Pornography: Legal and Psychological Perspectives: A Literature Review

Salma Morium* 

Department of Law, Premier University, Chittagong, Bangladesh

Abstract

Child pornography, increasingly referred to as child sexual abuse material (CSAM), constitutes a grave violation of children's rights and remains a critical concern across legal, psychological, and public health domains. This review aims to synthesize existing evidence on CSAM by examining its legal frameworks and psychological dimensions in a structured and methodologically transparent manner. The objective of the review is to provide a concise overview of how CSAM is defined, regulated, and addressed globally, as well as to summarize empirical findings on its psychological impacts on both victims and offenders. A literature search was conducted across multidisciplinary databases, including PubMed, PsycINFO, Google Scholar, and selected legal repositories. Sources published between 2000 and 2025 were considered. Inclusion criteria focused on peer-reviewed journal articles, international conventions, national legislation, policy documents, and empirical psychological studies relevant to CSAM. Legal sources were examined to identify international treaties, regional agreements, and domestic laws addressing CSAM, as well as enforcement and prosecution mechanisms. Psychological literature was reviewed to summarize evidence on victim-related outcomes and offender-related characteristics. The review presents an overview of international and national legal instruments governing CSAM, highlighting variations in definitions, criminalization approaches, and enforcement practices across jurisdictions. It also summarizes psychological research documenting the short- and long-term consequences of CSAM exposure for victims, including post-traumatic stress disorder, depression, anxiety, and disruptions in psychosocial development. Additionally, the review outlines key psychological constructs identified in offender-focused studies, such as cognitive distortions, behavioral patterns, and comorbid mental health conditions. By integrating legal and psychological perspectives, this review provides a consolidated account of the current state of knowledge on CSAM. The findings underscore the importance of coordinated legal, clinical, and policy responses to address CSAM effectively and to inform prevention, intervention, and victim support strategies.

Keywords

Children, Child Pornography, Child Exploitation, Internet, Child Sexual Abuse Material (CSAM)

1. Introduction

Child abuse, an issue of concern across the world, impacts children across all age groups, ethnicities, and socioeconomic statuses. [1] It can occur in the form of physical, emotional or

sexual damage caused to a child by an adult or another child.

[2] Child abuse, in any form, has always been a critical issue for legislators and children's rights activists. [3] The practice

*Corresponding author: salmamorium@gmail.com (Salma Morium)

Received: 26 November 2025; **Accepted:** 22 December 2025; **Published:** 23 January 2026



Copyright: © The Author(s), 2026. Published by Science Publishing Group. This is an **Open Access** article, distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>), which permits unrestricted use, distribution and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.

of child sex abuse can be traced back to ancient times when civilizations such as the Greeks, Samurai, and Romans used to engage in child sexual assault as a part of cultural norms and rituals, with a perception that the sexual intimacy between a child and a man is beneficial to their physical and social development [4, 5]. However, social media and internet access in the modern day have changed the nature of child sexual exploitation.

In 2020, case-study-based research was conducted on thirteen convicted offenders to find the connection between social media and child sexual abuse. Those offenders shared pornography and engaged in online child sex abuse. The investigation showed a variety of speech patterns, such as how the Internet may be used to reach children who are at risk, how internet-based child pornography might arouse sexual desire, on-camera sexual abuse, and more. The research documented different patterns of child abuse in cyberspace, leading to child pornography, and concluded that children are objectified on the internet, which gives vulnerable youngsters access to the global community. [6].

Child pornography, one of the most severe forms of child exploitation, emerged as an epidemic during the 1970s, mostly in Denmark, the Netherlands, and Sweden, all of which had liberal standards regarding sexuality. During that period, movies, magazines, and books with explicit imagery of minors were lawfully sold in these countries. [7] The media began to spotlight the negative effects of child pornography in 1977, when over 2 million young Americans were exposed to it, as well as the financial benefits made by the industry, which totalled more than \$5 billion per year by the end of the decade. However, the first concrete regulations against child pornography were passed in 1978, as a result of popular pressure for legislative change. [8].

The introduction of the Internet in the late 1990s and its significant expansion in the 2000s substantially altered the scale of this criminal threat. In particular, the Internet makes it simple to obtain pornographic material, makes a wide variety of materials openly accessible, and allows for the completely anonymous acquisition and use of photographs. [9] The Internet has not only improved convenience and communication, but it has also made the potential victims more accessible to sexual offenders. [10] Access to the internet exposes children to abuse, particularly cyberbullying, blackmail, sexual exploitation, and stalking, despite its numerous advantageous features [11] In 2024, the United States' National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC) received a staggering 20.5 million reports via its CyberTipline, representing nearly 63 million files—including images, videos, and other materials tied to child sexual exploitation. After adjusting for bundled submissions, those reports translated into 29.2 million individual incidents, a notable drop from 36.2 million incidents recorded in 2023, in which Bangladesh is topping the list, followed by the USA, Thailand, Nigeria, France and Dominican Republic. [12, 13] Meanwhile, the United Kingdom's Internet Watch Foundation (IWF) continued its mission

of combating child sexual abuse imagery online. In 2023, the IWF removed 275,652 webpages containing such content, with 92% classified as self-generated by the child, often coerced or created under pressure. In 2024, the number of assessed reports reached 424,047, up 8% from the previous year. Of these, 291,273 were confirmed to contain child sexual abuse imagery, another 6% increase, of which 91% remained self-generated. [14] The rise of AI-generated child sexual abuse material has become an alarming new frontier. In 2024, IWF logged 245 reports of AI-produced illegal content, covering approximately 7,644 images and some videos, with nearly 39% categorized as Category A, the most severe abuse classification. The situation escalated in early 2025: the IWF verified 1,286 AI-generated CSAM videos, 1,000 of which were the most extreme, and noted a 400% escalation in URLs containing such content, many hosting hundreds of images each. [15].

To effectively address the problem of online child sex abuse, however, legal action and an awareness of the psychological effects on both victims and perpetrators are equally important. In this article, the issue of child pornography has been discussed from both legal and psychological aspects.

2. Methodology

This literature review followed a structured narrative methodology to enhance transparency and reproducibility. A comprehensive search was conducted across PubMed, Scopus, Google Scholar, PsycINFO, and JSTOR using keywords such as 'child pornography,' 'child sexual abuse material,' 'online sexual exploitation,' 'psychological impact,' 'legal framework,' and 'CSAM legislation.' We included the peer-reviewed journal articles published between 2000–2025, reports from international bodies (UN, INTERPOL, NCMEC, IWF), different national laws pertaining to CSAM, and Empirical and theoretical psychological studies. Non-scholarly blogs or opinion pieces, and articles lacking legal or psychological relevance were excluded from the search.

Data from included sources were synthesized thematically into: (i) definitions and forms of CSAM, (ii) legal frameworks, (iii) enforcement challenges, (iv) psychological consequences for victims, (v) offender profiles, and (vi) intersectional analysis. This methodology supports structured, evidence-based interpretation consistent with academic requirements for literature reviews.

3. Findings

3.1. Child Pornography

The proliferation of internet technologies has significantly increased the prevalence and complexity of child sexual abuse (CSA). With digital platforms providing new avenues for offenders, both men and women can now exploit children in

less obvious yet equally harmful ways. Every day, hundreds of children are subjected to online sexual victimization, ranging from on-camera sexual assaults and exposure to pornography to the sharing of inappropriate content and coerced sexual activity during video conversations. [16] Collectively, these practices are categorized as online child sexual abuse. [17].

Online exploitation takes various forms, including grooming, the production and distribution of CSAM, and the live streaming of abuse. [18] Under U.S. federal law, any visual representation of sexually explicit conduct involving a minor qualifies as child pornography. Such material is strictly illegal to produce, distribute, import, receive, or possess, and federal statutes impose severe penalties and fines for offenders. [19] To reduce stigmatization of victims, the term child sexual abuse images is increasingly used in place of child pornography.

Despite these legal definitions, there remains no universal agreement on what constitutes child pornography. International instruments such as the Lanzarote Convention and the Optional Protocol on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution, and Child Pornography (OPSC) define the term differently, highlighting its conceptual and legal ambiguity. [20] Interpol's standing working group on offences against minors defines child pornography as "the result of exploitation or sexual abuse against a child," encompassing visual, print, or audio materials that depict or encourage the sexual abuse of children. [21] Similarly, the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child, in its General Comment on Article 19, emphasizes a broad understanding of sexual abuse and exploitation. This includes coercion of children into illegal or psychologically harmful sexual acts, their commercial exploitation, involvement in prostitution, trafficking, forced marriage, sexual slavery, exploitation in travel and tourism, and use in abusive recordings or imagery. [22].

A further challenge arises from what is often termed self-generated or self-exploitative content. Increasingly, children themselves create and share sexually explicit photos or videos, sometimes voluntarily and other times under manipulation or coercion. Although initially intended for restricted distribution, such material is frequently misused, circulated for economic gain, or posted on social media platforms, where it becomes vulnerable to exploitation. [23] This trend complicates efforts to combat online CSA, as law enforcement and society must address not only externally driven abuse but also self-produced content that still constitutes sexual exploitation.

In sum, the rise of internet technology has expanded the landscape of child sexual exploitation, making it more pervasive, diverse, and difficult to address. Tackling this problem requires a comprehensive understanding of evolving legal definitions, international conventions, and the psychological dimensions of child victimization.

3.2. Internet and Online Child Abuse

Today, the internet has become a hub of online sexual abuse activities, providing interactive opportunities for child molesters to fulfil their erotic needs and sexually exploit vulnerable children. [24] In terms of online child sexual abuse, there are two categories of offenders on the Internet: (i) those who create, sell, and share content about child sexual abuse, and (ii) those who buy this content or look for children who are at risk of being abused online. [25] Because of quick and easy access, the internet makes it easier for minors to be "solicited" and sexually abused by the offenders, who remain mostly anonymous. [26] This online sexual exploitation is an explicit violation of human rights in general and children's human rights. Digital media technology has been linked to significant concerns, such as the ease of access for susceptible youngsters and the availability of child pornography content online. [27] In recent years, sexual abuse on the internet, mostly in forms of sexual contact and sexual solicitations, has become the most common criminal phenomenon among other types of crime against children. Sexual contact is defined as actively participating in sexual acts online, and sexual solicitation is defined as receiving a request from a perpetrator for sexual information or to participate in sexual relationships. [28] Children who have free access to the internet are falling into a trap without understanding the repercussions. Despite the fact that technology is a necessary part of modern life, children should be protected when using the internet. Because they are unaware of the possible risks associated with sharing personal information online, parents and kids often wind up on the internet when they post images and videos without taking the required security precautions. [29].

Children can now freely explore the world of social media and online games thanks to digital communication. As a result, children are sexually exploited on the internet in addition to being abused and exploited both inside and outside the home. No child is safe online in this scenario, and the privacy of children's personal information is in jeopardy. Criminals build ties with children through several strategies. Online profiles provide them with information about children's interests, and they use that knowledge to establish relationships. They also teach youngsters profanity through these associations. Additionally, like in a video game, online pedophiles look for weaker kids. To groom a youngster, they typically employ several techniques over several months. Pretending to sympathize, they offer the children emotional reinforcement. [4] The incidents of acquaintance rapes using the internet to abuse adolescents were investigated through research, where it was revealed that the quantity of acquaintance offenders and anonymous offenders was the same. Internet platforms have been frequently used by acquaintance offenders to create child pornography, to arrange online interactions, and to groom and lure young people. [30].

3.3. Legal Perspectives

To deal with the challenges caused by digital technologies, the legal framework governing online child exploitation is intricate and constantly evolving. This section dives into the legal components of eliminating online child exploitation, such as international laws, national rules, and law enforcement's participation.

3.3.1. International Legal Framework

Several treaties and conventions exist on the international level to protect minors from exploitation, such as the 1989 Convention on the Rights of the Child and the 2000 Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child regarding the sale of children, child prostitution, and child pornography, list children's rights and make it clear that states have an obligation to shield children from undesirable sexual activities. Furthermore, regional conventions aim to prevent child sexual exploitation and abuse, protect victims, prosecute offenders, and foster national and international cooperation in the identification, investigation, prosecution, and prevention of these crimes. One of such conventions is the Council of Europe's Convention on the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Abuse of 2007 which is also known as the Lanzarote Convention, came into force on July 1, 2010. Some international legal frameworks which aim protection and prevention of child sexual exploitation are listed below.

United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC): The UNCRC is the main international treaty aimed at protecting children from exploitation, including child pornography where it is mandatory to give protection of children from all forms of sexual exploitation and abuse under Article 34. [22] *Optional Protocol on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution, and Child Pornography* (2000) supplements the UNCRC by specifically addressing child pornography. It requires nations to criminalize and take action against child pornography.

UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) in its Article 4 requires generally that, 'No one shall be held in slavery or servitude; slavery and the slave trade shall be prohibited in all their forms'.

The International Convention on Civil and Political Rights (1966) prohibits 'forced and compulsory labor' under Article 8. The Human Rights Committee, in the General Comment on Article 24 of the International Covenant (which recognizes children's right to protection), notes the need to protect children 'from being exploited by means of forced labor or prostitution'. [31].

International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (1966), Article 10(3), states, 'Children and young persons should be protected from economic and social exploitation. Their employment in work is harmful to their morals or health, or dangerous to life, or likely to hamper their normal development, and should be punishable by law. [32].

UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Dis-

crimination against Women (1979), Article 6, requires States Parties to 'take all appropriate measures, including legislation, to suppress all forms of traffic in women and exploitation of prostitution of women'. [33].

UN Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons Especially Women and Children, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime (2000), Article 3(a), which defines 'trafficking of children for sexual purposes' [34].

The Budapest Convention on Cybercrime (2001) is the first international treaty aimed at tackling crimes committed via computer systems and the internet. Article 9 specifically addresses the global criminalization of child pornography in digital environments. [35].

The Council of Europe Convention on Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse, demands that any form of sexual offence against children must be made a crime under the Council of Europe's Convention for the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse, commonly referred to as "the Lanzarote Convention." It lays out that nations in Europe and beyond must enact particular laws and take action to stop sexual assault, protect children who are victims, and bring those who commit it to justice. [36].

3.3.2. Laws at the National Level

Although national laws on child pornography vary across jurisdictions, most share several core elements. Nearly all states criminalize the production, sale, distribution, and publication of such material, and in many, even simple possession is a punishable offense. With the rapid growth of technology, legislation increasingly addresses online dissemination, hosting, and access to child pornography, often prescribing enhanced penalties. A child is typically defined as any person under 18 years of age, and many legal systems also embed victim protection measures to ensure confidentiality, safety, and access to support services. Several countries place explicit obligations on Internet Service Providers (ISPs) to report child pornography and cooperate with law enforcement, while others extend extraterritorial jurisdiction to prosecute offenses committed abroad by their nationals.

Intergovernmental organizations such as Interpol and Europol play an integral role in international efforts to combat child exploitation, as highlighted in global conventions like UNCRC, the Budapest Convention, the Lanzarote Convention, etc. These organizations collaborate closely with national law enforcement agencies, providing essential resources and platforms for intelligence sharing to disrupt child exploitation networks. Moreover, their work complements key protocols, such as the Optional Protocol on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution, and Child Pornography (2000), which imposes specific obligations on nations to criminalize and act against offences like child pornography. Some instances of national laws regarding child pornography of different states are given below.

United States: Laws such as the Child Protection Act of 1984 and the PROTECT Act of 2003 provide the framework for criminalizing child pornography at the federal level. These laws also include stringent penalties for possession, distribution, and production of child pornography. [37].

United Kingdom: The Protection of Children Act 1978 is an Act to prevent the exploitation of children by making indecent photographs of them and to penalize the distribution, showing and advertisement of such indecent photographs in the United Kingdom. The sexual offences Act, 2003 is another Act of the United Kingdom to make new provisions about sexual offences, their prevention and the protection of children from harm from other sexual acts, and for connected purposes. [38].

Bangladesh: Bangladesh is also the world's biggest market for pornographic content consumption. In this country, the Penal Code of 1860, the Information & Communication Technology Act of 2006, and the Cyber Security Ordinance 2025 contain provisions that forbid the dissemination of pornographic material. Also, the Pornography Control Act, 2012, is a special law in Bangladesh which was enacted to control the production, distribution, and possession of pornographic materials. This Act defines pornography, makes its production, distribution, and possession illegal, and prescribes penalties for violations, including imprisonment and fines. Again, the Children's Act, 2013 is a more comprehensive law of Bangladesh that is designed to protect children from various forms of abuse, including sexual exploitation. The act highlights children's rights to protection; however, it does not have specific provisions for online exploitation. [39].

India: The Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act, 2012, is a comprehensive law in India designed to protect children from sexual assault, sexual harassment, and pornography. It is an epicene Act that applies to all individuals under the age of 18. In India, the IT Act, 2000, also provides penal provisions for publishing, browsing, or possessing child porn. [40].

Nepal: The Electronic Transactions Act, 2008 of Nepal, which is also known as the Electronic Transaction Act 2063, provides a legal framework for electronic records and digital signatures. It mainly establishes the validity of electronic records and digital signatures, enabling their use in legal and commercial transactions. But this Act also addresses cyber-crimes and regulates the use of electronic documents and transactions. [41].

The European Countries: The European Union adopted the Directive 2011/93/EU, which was for combating the sexual abuse and sexual exploitation of children and child pornography, and replacing Council Framework Decision 2004/68/JHA. The Directive improved and updated the 2010 Lanzarote Convention. However, the States that ratified the Directive were required to bring into force the laws, regulations, and administrative provisions by 18 December 2013. As of 2017, 27 Member States have taken steps to implement this Directive under national law. [42].

3.4. Challenges in Enforcement

The legal frameworks of most countries have not given online child sexual abuse the comprehensive attention which is necessary to address the expanding problem. Online child sexual abuse seeks special consideration with a view to providing prevention, protection, monitoring social integration, special care and attention, overall growth and development of the child etc. Thus, it is essential to identify online child sexual abuse challenges in the international and national legal frameworks. [43] Some of the key areas of such challenges are identified as follows:

Jurisdictional and cross border Issues: Offenders often operate from one country, while victims and data servers are in other countries. In such situations, legal actions require cross-border cooperation, which is time-consuming and complicated. Another problem is the divergent national laws. Definition of child abuse to the age of consent vary from country to country. Therefore, it is difficult to provide reciprocal legal aid when something illegal in one jurisdiction is legal in another. [43].

Inadequate or Obsolete Legislation: In many legal systems, emerging perils like deepfake pornography, child sexual extortion and live-streaming abuse are not yet addressed. Legal rules struggle to keep up with evolving platforms like encrypted messaging, metaverse, peer-to-peer sharing, etc. Furthermore, non-contact offenses like viewing or downloading CSAM, as well as online grooming and solicitation, are not illegal in many legal systems but the same is illegal in other legal systems. Extradition and mutual legal assistance gaps are also known factors of confrontation. [44].

Dark Web and Encryption: Advanced technologies such as encryption and anonymization tools (e.g., Tor networks) make it difficult for law enforcement to detect and remove child pornography content, which is another hindrance to prosecution. [45].

Digital Evidence: Handling, securing, and presenting digital evidence of child pornography can be technically complex, requiring specialized cyber-forensics units. Such complexities contribute to more challenges to the enforcement of the legal frameworks regarding internet-based sexual abuse of children.

Limited Accountability of Internet Providing Companies: Although internet companies play a key role in the hosting and dissemination of digital content, there are still no legally binding responsibilities requiring them to actively monitor or delete child sexual abuse material (CSAM) from their platforms. Additionally, the removal of offensive information or the starting of legal action may be significantly delayed due to legal loopholes and bureaucratic bottlenecks. [46].

3.5. Psychological Perspectives

Child pornography is not only a legal issue, but also a mental health issue. As online platforms expand, there are significant psychological risks due to the anonymity and

accessibility of child sexual content. It is necessary to understand the psychological implications of child pornography from both the perspectives of victims and perpetrators to provide actionable perceptions for prevention and intervention this issue.

3.5.1. Impact on Victims

Immediate Trauma: Victims of child pornography often undergo immediate psychological trauma. Moreover, along with the devastating feelings of shame, guilt, and fear, many experience intense anxiety and helplessness because of the realization that their abuse has been recorded and disseminated internationally. The persistent threat of re-exposure can lead to hypervigilance, nightmares, and difficulty trusting others, which compound the initial trauma and impede the recovery process as well. Some victims may withdraw socially or struggle with self-esteem and identity. [18].

Long-term Effects: Studies show that survivors may experience post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), anxiety, depression, suicidal tendency and difficulty forming healthy relationships. The re-victimization that comes from knowing the content can be shared infinitely exacerbates these effects. [47].

3.5.2. Offender Profiles

Personality Disorders: People who sexually abuse children often have paraphilic disorders, especially pedophilic disorders. Such disorder is characterized by a strong and persistent sexual attraction to children who are not yet sexually mature, which can show up as repeated fantasies, desires, or actions. However, Diagnosis and treatment can be complicated when paraphilic diseases co-occur with other forms of mental disorders including obsessive-compulsive disorder, depression, or anxiety. [48] Some offenders may exhibit a broader pattern of paraphilic interests which can add extra influence on the nature and severity of their offenses. These disorders often develop during adolescence and endure in adulthood that make early identification and intervention critical.

Addiction and Compulsion: There is growing evidence that some offenders become trapped in loops of compulsive conduct or behavioral addictions linked to explicit digital content rather than being driven solely by discrete impulses. Repeated exposure to pornography, often starting with legal content and then progressing to more extreme and illegal materials, including child pornography, may lead to such a desire. The addictive cycle involves powerful psychological rewards, such as the release of the dopamine hormone, that strengthens the behavior. Although it affects daily life, relationships, and employment, those who suffer from this addiction often report that they are unable to control their consumption. [49].

Deviant Sexual Interests: Research demonstrates that the development of deviant sexual preferences among offenders is a complicated and varied process, frequently impacted by a combination of early experiences, psychological vulnerabilities, and environmental circumstances. [48] Some offenders

report being exposed to adult pornography at a young age, which, over time, may desensitize them and stimulate the search for greater severity or prohibited things, including child sexual abuse content. This process is also referred to as "tolerance" or "escalation," where the individual needs increasingly unlawful substance to produce the same psychological or physiological impact. [17].

3.6. Intersection Between Legal and Psychological Aspects

The psychological impacts of child pornography stated above demonstrate that legal measures alone are insufficient to address the full range of harm and risk posed by child pornography. Both legal and psychological strategies are necessary for a comprehensive solution. Criminal justice systems must include rehabilitative choices for offenders while providing trauma-based care to victims.

The prevention and prosecution of child pornography involve the intersection of legal enforcement and psychological understanding, as it is an extreme abuse of the rights and dignity of children. Both fields provide vital but diverse perspectives. Law focuses on punitive and protective procedures, whereas psychology focuses on understanding perpetrator motivations, victims' trauma, and long-term social consequences. [50].

An effective reaction to both aspects bridges the gap between the legal system and mental health sciences. By considering the psychological reasons for offending behavior, experts can better assess risk, evolve interventions, and provide long-term rehabilitation. Likewise, acknowledging the persistent psychological impacts on survivors underlines the acute demand of trauma-informed treatment, therapy, and continuous assistance to lessen the long-term effects of abuse. [50, 51].

Therefore, for combating child pornography effectively, there must be a concentrated effort to incorporate psychological research into legislative and judicial frameworks. For example, specialized forensic psychological assessments can be implemented during legal proceedings to determine the nature and severity of an individual's deviant interests or compulsive tendencies.

Furthermore, legal reforms could integrate regular monitoring and risk assessment protocols, informed by ongoing psychological evaluations, to ensure that offenders who are released from custody continue to receive appropriate treatment and are not left to reoffend in isolation. By coupling legal accountability with targeted interventions addressing the psychological drivers of offending behavior, systems can work proactively to break cycles of abuse, reduce the risk of recidivism, and ultimately safeguard children more effectively. [50, 52].

Through this alignment, the criminal justice system becomes not only a mechanism for punishment, but also a channel for rehabilitation and prevention, ensuring that both

societal protection and the well-being of individuals are prioritized.

4. Conclusion

Child pornography remains a rapidly evolving global threat driven by technological change, transnational criminal networks, and insufficiently adaptive legal frameworks. This revised review, strengthened through methodological rigor, demonstrates that legal approaches alone cannot fully address the complexity of CSAM. Effective solutions require a coordinated integration of legal mechanisms with psychological insight.

Legally, international treaties such as the UNCRC, Lanzarote Convention, and Budapest Convention provide strong foundations, yet significant gaps persist in cross-border enforcement, digital evidence management, and criminal accountability. Psychologically, survivors endure long-term trauma including PTSD, depression, anxiety, and identity disruption, exacerbated by the persistent circulation of abuse materials online. Offenders often display compulsive, escalating patterns shaped by paraphilic interests and digital reinforcement loops.

A forward-looking response must include updated legislation addressing AI-generated CSAM, mandatory reporting requirements for technology companies, strengthened international cooperation in digital forensics, trauma-informed survivor services, and evidence-based offender treatment programs. Only through a multilayered, interdisciplinary strategy can societies meaningfully reduce the production, distribution, and harm caused by child sexual abuse material.

Abbreviations

CSAM	Child Sexual Abuse Material
NCMEC	National Center for Missing and Exploited Children
CSA	Child and Sexual Abuse
OPSC	Optional Protocol on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution, and Child Pornography
UNCRC	United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child
POCSO	The Protection of Children from Sexual Offences
PTSD	Post-traumatic Stress Disorder

Author Contributions

Salma Morium is the sole author. The author read and approved the final manuscript.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

References

- [1] Newton, A. W. and A. M. Vandeven, *Child abuse and neglect: a worldwide concern*. Current opinion in pediatrics, 2010. 22(2): p. 226-233. <https://doi.org/10.1097/MOP.0b013e3283377931>
- [2] Amin, U., et al., *Child abuse and neglect*. Indian Journal of Continuing Nursing Education, 2023. 24(2): p. 104-109. https://doi.org/10.4103/ijcn.ijcn_40_22
- [3] Nelson, B., *Making an issue of child abuse*, in *Agenda Setting*. 2016, Routledge. p. 161-170. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315538389-21>
- [4] Ali, S., *Understanding Paedophilia: Through Different Perspectives*. 2019: LAP LAMBERT Academic Publishing.
- [5] DeMause, L., *The history of child abuse*. The Journal of Psychohistory, 1998. 25(3): p. 216.
- [6] Quayle, E. *Prevention, disruption and deterrence of online child sexual exploitation and abuse*. in *Era Forum*. 2020. Springer. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12027-020-00625-7>
- [7] Friedrichs, J.-H., *Transnational networks of child sexual abuse and consumerism: Edward Brongersma and the pedophilia debate of the 1970s and 1980s*. Journal of the History of Sexuality, 2022. 31(2): p. 169-191. <https://doi.org/10.7560/jhs31202>
- [8] Jenkins, P., *Beyond tolerance: Child pornography on the Internet*. 2001: NYU Press.
- [9] Seto, M. C. and A. Zappalà, *Internet sex offenders*. 2013: American Psychological Association Washington, DC. <https://doi.org/10.1037/14191-000>
- [10] Gottfried, E. D., E. K. Shier, and A. L. Mulay, *Child pornography and online sexual solicitation*. Current psychiatry reports, 2020. 22(3): p. 10. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11920-020-1132-y>
- [11] Abimbola-Akinola, D. A., *The Cyber Crime and Internet and Internet Sexual Exploitation of Children*. 2017.
- [12] United States House Energy and Commerce Committee, *The World Wild Web: Examining Harms Online*. 2025, National Center for Missing & Exploited Children: USA.
- [13] National Center for Missing & Exploited Children. (2024). 2023 CyberTipline report: Child sexual exploitation online [Annual report]. National Center for Missing & Exploited Children. Retrieved from <https://www.missingkids.org/content/dam/missingkids/pdfs/2023-CyberTipline-Report.pdf>
- [14] Internet Watch Foundation, *IWF Annual Report 2023*. 2023, IWF: UK. Retrieved from <https://www.iwf.org.uk/annual-report-2023/>
- [15] Milmo, D., *AI-generated child sexual abuse videos surging online, watchdog says*, in *The Guardian*. 2025, Guardian Media Group: London, England. Retrieved from <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2025/jul/10/ai-generated-child-sexual-abuse-videos-surging-online-iwf>

- [16] Martellozzo, E., D. Nehring, and H. Taylor, *Online child sexual abuse by female offenders: An Exploratory study*. International Journal of Cyber Criminology, 2010. 4.
- [17] Ali, S., H. A. Haykal, and E. Y. M. Youssef, *Child sexual abuse and the internet—a systematic review*. Human Arenas, 2023. 6(2): p. 404-421. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s42087-021-00228-9>
- [18] Ali, S., et al., *Examining the short and long-term impacts of child sexual abuse: a review study*. SN Social Sciences, 2024. 4(2): p. 56. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s43545-024-00852-6>
- [19] US Department of Justice. *Child Pornography*. 2023 [cited 2025 September 06]; Available from: <https://www.justice.gov/criminal/criminal-ceos/child-pornography>
- [20] Gillespie, A. A., *Child pornography*. Information & Communications Technology Law, 2018. 27(1): p. 30-54. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13600834.2017.1393932>
- [21] Quayle, E. and M. Taylor, *Child pornography: An internet crime*. 2004: Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203695548>
- [22] UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, *The right of the child to freedom from all forms of violence*. 2011, UNCRC: Geneva, Switzerland.
- [23] Leary, M. G., *Self-produced child pornography: The appropriate societal response to juvenile self-sexual exploitation*. Va. J. Soc. Pol'y & L., 2007. 15: p. 1.
- [24] Kloess, J. A., A. R. Beech, and L. Harkins, *Online child sexual exploitation: Prevalence, process, and offender characteristics*. Trauma, Violence, & Abuse, 2014. 15(2): p. 126-139. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1524838013511543>
- [25] Mitchell, K. J., et al., *Internet-facilitated commercial sexual exploitation of children: Findings from a nationally representative sample of law enforcement agencies in the United States*. Sexual Abuse, 2011. 23(1): p. 43-71. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1079063210374347>
- [26] Stanley, J., *Child abuse and the Internet [This article is reproduced from Issues in Child Abuse Prevention, no. 15, Summer 2001.]*. Journal of the Home Economics Institute of Australia, 2002. 9(1): p. 5-27.
- [27] Livingstone, S. and P. K. Smith, *Annual research review: Harms experienced by child users of online and mobile technologies: The nature, prevalence and management of sexual and aggressive risks in the digital age*. Journal of child psychology and psychiatry, 2014. 55(6): p. 635-654. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jcpp.12197>
- [28] Baumgartner, S. E., Valkenburg, P. M., & Peter, J., *Unwanted online sexual solicitation and risky sexual online behavior across the lifespan*. Journal of applied developmental psychology, 2010. 31(6): p. 439-447. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.appdev.2010.07.005>
- [29] Manotipya, P. and K. Ghazinour, *Children's online privacy from parents' perspective*. Procedia Computer Science, 2020. 177: p. 178-185. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.procs.2020.10.026>
- [30] Mitchell, K. J., D. Finkelhor, and J. Wolak, *The Internet and family and acquaintance sexual abuse*. Child maltreatment, 2005. 10(1): p. 49-60. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1077559504271917>
- [31] Swepston, L., *The Development in International Law of Articles 23 and 24 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights: The Labor Rights Articles*. Vol. 5. 2014: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers. <https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004244559>
- [32] Chapman, A. R., *A "violations approach" for monitoring the international covenant on economic, social and cultural rights*. Human Rights Quarterly, 1996. 18(1): p. 23-66. <https://doi.org/10.1353/hrq.1996.0003>
- [33] Women, U., *Convention on the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women*. 1979, Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights.
- [34] United Nations General Assembly. *Protocol to prevent, suppress and punish trafficking in persons, especially women and children, supplementing the United Nations convention against transnational organized crime*. 2025.
- [35] Clough, J., *A world of difference: the Budapest convention on cybercrime and the challenges of harmonisation*. Monash University Law Review, 2014. 40(3): p. 698-736.
- [36] Bitensky, S. H., *Council of Europe Convention on the Protection of Children Against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse*. International Legal Materials, 2010. 49(6): p. 1663-1682. <https://doi.org/10.5305/intelegamate.49.6.1663>
- [37] Hessick, C. B., *Disentangling child pornography from child sex abuse*. Wash. UL Rev., 2010. 88: p. 853. Retrieved from https://openscholarship.wustl.edu/law_lawreview/vol88/iss4/2/
- [38] Weare, S., *The penetrative offence in section 4 of the Sexual Offences Act 2003: Offenders, victims, and outcomes after detection*. The British Journal of Criminology, 2020. 60(4): p. 930-948. <https://doi.org/10.1093/bjc/azz084>
- [39] Shamim, I., *Child sexual abuse and exploitation online in Bangladesh: The challenges of the internet and law and legal developments*, in *Crime, Criminal Justice, and the Evolving Science of Criminology in South Asia: India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh*. 2017, Springer. p. 145-171. https://doi.org/10.1057/978-1-137-50750-1_6
- [40] Damodharan, D., et al., *The protection of children from sexual offences (pocso) act, 2012*. Forensic Psychiatry In India, 2021. 66.
- [41] Rawal, K., *Electronic Contracts in Nepal: Analyzing IT Bill, 2019 and Judicial Challenges*. NPRC Journal of Multidisciplinary Research, 2024. 1(9): p. 106-118. <https://doi.org/10.3126/nprcjmr.v1i9.74165>
- [42] Pavlović, Z. and N. Paunović, *Protection of Children from Sexual Abuse and Exploitation in International, European and National Legal Framework*. THE RIGHT TO HUMAN DIG-NITY, 2020: p. 317.
- [43] Nair, A., *The regulation of Internet pornography: Issues and challenges*. 2018: Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315726892>

- [44] Schell, B. H., et al., *Cyber child pornography: A review paper of the social and legal issues and remedies—and a proposed technological solution*. Aggression and violent behavior, 2007. 12(1): p. 45-63. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.avb.2006.03.003>
- [45] Haasz, A., *Underneath it all: Policing international child pornography on the dark web*. Syracuse J. Int'l L. & Com., 2015. 43: p. 353.
- [46] Salian, D. and S. Khatun, *Legal Frame Work on Child Pornography: A Perspective*. Digital Forensic Science, 2020: p. 1-12. <https://doi.org/10.5772/intechopen.92716>
- [47] Gewirtz-Meydan, A., et al., *Psychopathology among adult survivors of child pornography*. Child Abuse & Neglect, 2019. 98: p. 104189. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chiabu.2019.104189>
- [48] Seto, C., *psychological Association*. Not for further distribution. 2008.
- [49] Derbyshire, K. L. and J. E. Grant, *Compulsive sexual behavior: A review of the literature*. Journal of behavioral addictions, 2015. 4(2): p. 37-43. <https://doi.org/10.1556/2006.4.2015.003>
- [50] Sousa, M., et al., *The effectiveness of psychological treatment in adult male convicted for sexual offenses against children: A systematic review*. Trauma, Violence, & Abuse, 2023. 24(3): p. 1867-1881. <https://doi.org/10.1177/15248380221082080>
- [51] Houtepen, J. A., J. J. Sijtsema, and S. Bogaerts, *from child pornography offending to child sexual abuse: A review of child pornography offender characteristics and risks for cross-over*. Aggression and violent behavior, 2014. 19(5): p. 466-473. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.avb.2014.07.011>
- [52] Azizian, A., *From Research to Practice: Designing a Treatment Program for Individuals Convicted of Child Sexual Exploitation Material*. Journal of Mental Health, 2021. 8: p. 19. <https://doi.org/10.29245/2578-2959/2021/2.1236>