

Philippine Journal of Child Sexual Abuse

ISSN 2243-9315

an interdisciplinary publication

Volume 14, 2025



**Published by
Center for Prevention and Treatment of Child Sexual Abuse**

Philippine Journal of Child Sexual Abuse
Volume 14 2025
ISSN 2243-9315

Editors

- Dr. Johnny Decatoria
- Dr. Reynaldo Lesaca, Jr.
 - Dr Emma Porio
- Dr. Lois J. Engelbrecht
- Dr. Lolita D. Pablo



A fisherman sees a child struggling as they are being swept downstream in the strong current. The child is saved and taken to the shore, where another adult is waiting to help, but another child suddenly appears, also struggling. The fisherman gets his wife to help, but soon there are too many children to save. Other villagers come to help, but they too realize that they cannot save all the children. So some of the villagers go upstream to find out the reason for why children are falling into the river. They find that the bridge over the river has a great deal of problems, allowing children to fall through the holes and broken planks. The community set about working to fix the bridge while at the same time stationing people at various places along the river bank to catch the children who do fall through, because fixing the bridge will take time. The community realizes the urgency of their task because, until the bridge is completely whole and strong, children will continue to fall through and while many will be caught along the way, some will never be caught.

Real prevention can only be accomplished when we each accept MAGING SOLUSYON.

**Understanding OSAEC (Online Sexual Abuse and Exploitation of Children) from the
parent facilitator's perspectives: Two case studies**

Argel B. Masanda, Ph.D.

*Center for the Prevention and Treatment of Child Sexual Abuse
Quezon City, Philippines*

Abstract

The Philippines has become the world's hotspot of live stream sexual assault (World Hope International, 2020) and that the online sexual exploitation and abuse of children (OSAEC) is a family-based crime (International Justice Mission, 2020). Furthermore, UNICEF (2016) revealed that the Philippines has emerged as the center of child sex abuse materials (CSAM) production in the world, with 80% of Filipino children vulnerable to online sexual abuse, some facilitated by their parents. All the cases reported took place in private homes, either in the house of the children, their relatives, or family friends who served as facilitators of the abuse and exploitation. The reason cited by research for parents to use their children in this manner is poverty and found further that funds gained from these efforts have been used only for daily needs. An important question remains, however, and that is how parents moved beyond the rationale of poverty to being an active and willing partner to abuse their children in this manner. This study sets out with that question. However, due to the sensitivity of the questions along with the already difficult access to incarcerated parents, only 2 potential participants agreed to be interviewed. While the study continued using the methodology as originally set out, due to only 2 respondents the report is written as case studies. Despite that only 2 case studies do not allow any generalizations, the data remains rich enough to allow professional sharing and to highlight new information for use in future research.

COMMENTARY

Kasabwat o co-facilitator?

**Redefining parents who produce child sexual abuse materials to use online: Two
case studies**

Zenaida Rosales and Lois J. Engelbrecht

*Center for the Prevention and Treatment of Child Sexual Abuse
Quezon City, Philippines*

Understanding OSAEC (Online Sexual Abuse and Exploitation of Children) from the parent facilitator's perspective: Two case studies

Argel B. Masanda, Ph.D.

Center for the Prevention and Treatment of Child Sexual Abuse
Quezon City, Philippines

Abstract

The Philippines has become the world's hotspot of live stream sexual assault (World Hope International, 2020) and that the online sexual exploitation and abuse of children (OSAEC) is a family-based crime (International Justice Mission, 2020). Furthermore, UNICEF (2016) revealed that the Philippines has emerged as the center of child sex abuse materials (CSAM) production in the world, with 80% of Filipino children vulnerable to online sexual abuse, some facilitated by their parents. All the cases reported took place in private homes, either in the house of the children, their relatives, or family friends who served as facilitators of the abuse and exploitation. The reason cited by research for parents to use their children in this manner is poverty and found further that funds gained from these efforts have been used only for daily needs. An important question remains, however, and that is how parents moved beyond the rationale of poverty to being an active and willing partner to abuse their children in this manner. This study sets out with that question. However, due to the sensitivity of the questions along with the already difficult access to incarcerated parents, only 2 potential participants agreed to be interviewed. While the study continued using the methodology as originally set out, due to only 2 respondents the report is written as case studies. Despite that only 2 case studies do not allow any generalizations, the data remains rich enough to allow professional sharing and to highlight new information for use in future research.

Introduction

One of the shadows of the COVID-19 pandemic that hit the world was the increase of Online Sexual Abuse and Exploitation of Children (OSAEC). The pandemic forced countries to resort to virtual transactions and engagements and made the internet more accessible to all ages; an unfortunate by-product was the sexualization of children on online platforms. In a country best with poverty, the increased and easy access to the internet predisposed families to resort to easy money. This is where children were subjected to engage in such virtual and other internet activities.

In the focused group discussion facilitated by Woord en Daad (2022) in Quezon City, many factors surfaced as driving the occurrence of OSAEC in the Philippines. Some were premised in lay and common understanding among Filipino families those online activities, even if they may involve some sorts of sexual engagement, are less threatening and therefore tolerable ("*no touch, no harm*" mentality). Many were also oblivious to pertinent laws associated with child sexual abuse. Layered down with poverty and lack of sufficient and proper education among some households, the lack of

awareness and need to make ends meet every single day were stressors that pushed them to engage in OSAEC

OSAEC in the Philippines

In the onset of the global pandemic one-in-five Filipino children between the ages of 12 and 17 were victims of serious online sexual abuse in 2020. Twenty percent (20%) of Filipinos between the ages of 12 and 17 who used the internet in the past year experienced serious incidences of online sexual exploitation and abuse. This involved being forced into sexual activity by offers of money or gifts, threats of sharing one's sexual photographs without consent, or being blackmailed into sexual activity. This amounted to an estimated two million children who were exposed to any of these effects in a single year (ECPAT, INTERPOL, and UNICEF, 2022).

In the same study (ECPAT, INTERPOL, and UNICEF, 2022) depending on the form of OSEAC in question, between 46% and 61% of OSEAC are committed by people the child does not know. However, it may also be encouraged and carried out by acquaintances of the youngsters. They can be the child's pals or acquaintances (both peers and adults), as well as spouses and family members. Over 90% of children who experienced OSEAC on social media did so on Facebook or Facebook Messenger, which were the most frequently used platforms. TikTok, Twitter, Instagram, and Snapchat were also mentioned, albeit far less frequently.

World Hope International (2020) stated that the Philippines had become the world's hotspot of live stream sexual assault. According to UNICEF (2016), 80% (8 out of 10) of Filipino children are at risk of experiencing online sexual abuse or bullying; 2.5% of children in the nation had their naked bodies or sexual behaviors exposed on the Internet or via a cellphone, it was also discovered. The Philippines has been under the longest and most stringent lockdown in the world during the Covid 19 [epidemic](#). The Department of Justice noted a tripling of OSAEC cases after the quarantine rules went into effect. Because of the quarantine, sexual predators became more and more reliant on the internet to prey on youngsters. In addition, the economic activity limits had created hardship and financial strain, which drove many Filipino families to turn to online sexual trafficking as a means of surviving.

Based on the research findings by International Justice Mission (2020), Online Sexual Exploitation and Abuse of Children (OSEAC) in the Philippines is a family-based crime. This finding is supported by the study of Hernandez et al. (2018) indicating that most of the local offenders, also referred to as facilitators, are family members, particularly mothers. Parents were involved in more than half of the cases cited in this study. Furthermore, an earlier UNICEF (2016) study revealed that the Philippines has emerged as the center of child sex abuse materials (CSAM) production in the world, with 80% of Filipino children vulnerable to online sexual abuse, some facilitated by

their parents. All the cases reported by the different key informants took place in private homes, either in the house of the children, their relatives, or family friends who served as facilitators of the abuse and exploitation. During the implementation of the expanded community quarantine from March to May 2020, there were 202,605 additional complaints of cases of online sexual abuse and exploitation of children (OSAEC) in the Philippines, a 264.6% increase (Ilagan, et al., 2021).

Child victimization

The sociocultural and economic factors that contribute to the Philippines' high concentration of child sex abuse materials (CSAM) include English language proficiency, accessibility to technology, well-established financial transactions, and the lack of any perceived conflict between sexual exploitation and important social norms (Varrella, 2017). Furthermore, it is acknowledged that the Internet is a risky environment for children since it provides the ideal setting for offenders to leverage a person's online profile for sexual exploitation and abuse (ECPAT, 2014; Wolak et al., 2008). Because there is little evidence of offensive content as live streaming does not require downloading or storing of content, and because children can move from one hidden location to another if there is internet access via a mobile device, online child sexual abuse is particularly dangerous and challenging to criminalize (Varella, 2017). Every youngster is vulnerable to online exploitation (Ospina et al., 2010).

One important characteristic that is considered as a predictor of vulnerability in relation to the type of exploitation that children typically experience is age. In general, young children have little to no choice in who they choose to hang out with (Mitchell, Finkelhor & Wolak, 2005). Since children under 10 are particularly obedient to the wishes or commands of their authority figures, they are more likely to be the topic of child abuse photographs (UNODC, 2015). Similar to young toddlers, family members may sexually abuse them because they are still reliant on them (Mitchell, Finkelhor & Wolak, 2005). The offenders capture images and films for the purpose of commercial sexual exploitation, and they occasionally involve young children in such activity (UNODC, 2015).

Teenagers are more susceptible to sexual exploitation at the time of life where they are determined to grow their social network because it demonstrates that they are content with taking risks, expressing emotional relationships with others, and motivated to learn about sex (Ospina, Harstall, & Dennett, 2010). Although these are typical developmental aspects, offenders use them as an excuse to initiate sexual contact. Due to their tendency to take risks, they engage in self-generating indecent imagery and frequently divulge sensitive information to create new acquaintances or find potential intimate partners (CEOP, 2013). Due to these actions, they run the risk of being taken advantage of (Mitchell et al., 2005). This is supported by Wolak et al. (2008), who noted that impulsiveness, immaturity, and inexperience frequently contribute to teenagers' vulnerability. Additionally, internet cafes without adult supervision are considered dangerous places for children to be exposed to sexual content and solicitation (ECPAT, 2014). Adolescents that are more susceptible to sexual assault and exploitation for reasons such as, depressive symptoms, family tensions, a history of physical abuse, and

According to UNODC (2015), children who face bullying in their neighborhood and feel abandoned by their real-life friends often resort to online friends as replacements since they have no one else to turn to. Even strangers they have only met online are given access to their personal information. Teenagers who run away from home due to parental disputes may also turn to sexual exploitation to satisfy their basic wants (Ospina et al., 2010). Furthermore, children who have undergone abuse and showed signs of depression have substantially lower self-esteem, making them more vulnerable to exploitation by offenders (UNODC, 2015; Wolak et al., 2008). Numerous studies have pinpointed the elements that make children vulnerable, but only a small number of them have been able to look at the consequences of exploitation (Whittle et al., 2013). These studies have found that not all victims are open to discussing their abuse, and some either deny that it ever happened or are encouraged to focus the blame on themselves rather than the abuser. According to Quayle (2016), a significant obstacle for researchers trying to understand the effects of this problem is the difficulty in interviewing sexual exploitation victims because of their unwillingness to reveal. However, some abuse survivors have been able to open out about the negative consequences this treatment has had on their life.

Cyberspace has evolved into an extension of children's physical and real environment, and sexual abuse occurs in both the digital and analog realms (Teunissen, 2012). Whittle and colleagues (2013) found that half of the victims they spoke to expressed psychological damage and believed that sexual exploitation had a long-term influence on their life. The emotional and societal repercussions are just two examples of these profound and dramatic impacts (ECPAT, 2006). In addition, there is a paucity of knowledge regarding how online sexual abuse and exploitation impacts minors, even though its effects are complicated and varied (ECPAT, 2008). However, if the abuse expands beyond the scope of internet transgressions, there can be further repercussions. These could include sustaining physical harm, becoming pregnant, having an unsafe abortion, and acquiring sexually transmitted illnesses (ECPAT, 2006). Additionally, before and during court cases, offenders threaten, harass, and physically assault children and their families (ECPAT, 2017).

Perpetrators of OSAEC

Commercial exploitation and abuse of children for sexual purposes are recognized crimes (Europol, 2015). The Internet has given offenders the chance to explore, express, and partake in asexual behavior (Kloess et al., 2014). The characteristics of criminals are hazy, and they don't always exhibit consistent behavior (Teunissen, 2012). However, studies have shown that while offenders may be seen as violent and sadistic, they are patient enough to form bonds with their victims and seduce them, sometimes even in person (Wolak et al., 2008). They are aware of the appropriate language to use with their victims to earn their trust, pique their interest in sexual matters, or give them permission to do sexual acts on the kids for the sake of commercial exploitation (Mitchell et al., 2005). The fact that these perpetrators are trained and educated further distinguishes them from individuals who are found guilty of contact sexual abuse (Wolak et al., 2008). The characteristics of perpetrators studied by Mitchell et al. (2005)

The fact that these perpetrators are trained and educated further distinguishes them from individuals who are found guilty of contact sexual abuse (Wolak et al., 2008). The characteristics of perpetrators studied by Mitchell et al. (2005) were found to have prior employment that offered them access to children. These criminals also exploit their victims for sexual gratification, and they have been found in possession of child pornographic materials (UNODC, 2015; Kloess et al., 2014).

For those who have been the victim of sexual exploitation, family is also very significant. Any family disputes might increase the likelihood that a child will be sexually exploited (Mitchell et al., 2005, UNODC, 2015). UNICEF Philippines (2019) claimed that poverty, urbanization, and family disintegration—where children frequently come from large, impoverished families with a single parent—are the main contributors to child abuse in the Philippines (Brown, 2016). To get money, parents or other family members are inspired to create sexual abuse materials featuring their children. They then decide to convert this into a company (UNODC, 2015). Furthermore, if their families cannot meet their fundamental requirements, children may opt to engage in survival sex merely to receive food and shelter (Mitchell & Jones, 2013). The child's difficult upbringing has been considered a determinant in his or her potential to become a victim or an offender of sexual exploitation (Ospina et al., 2010). According to reports, people who engage in this behavior have a history of experiencing physical or sexual abuse at the hands of their parents or other family members (Mitchell et al., 2005). Their ability to regulate their emotions is impacted, and they may even develop low self-esteem as a result, which increases their susceptibility to sexual exploitation.

Studies on the characteristics of offenders show that family members, including grandparents, uncles, and stepparents, as well as adult relations, abuse children (Mitchell et al., 2005). Authoritarian parents view their children as possessions. Children who are helpless in such a system can be compelled to engage in online sex to meet material demands, as well as, in certain families, to feed an addiction. Children acquire a pattern of conduct because they think that these dysfunctional family dynamics are typical.

Families, however, can instead operate as a protective factor for the abused child. Teenagers with high levels of social support were more likely to seek assistance when they were subjected to sexual advances, according to one online behavior study (DeMarco et al., 2017). Furthermore, it indicates that a victim of sexual abuse's recovery process is greatly aided by their family's support (Whittle et al., 2013). The child's adverse response to victimization may be reduced with social assistance (Acar, 2016). The youngsters were given adequate support to be able to overcome the negative effects of sexual exploitation in their lives, which led to rehabilitation programs that included family members throughout therapies being determined to be helpful (UNODC, 2015).

Approaches against OSAEC

According to PCMN (Philippine Children's Ministry Network, 2021), although not everyone has internet access at home, almost all youngsters do, according to their parents. Most children use the internet daily, with some of them using it for up to 12 hours every day. While most children and youth only use their smartphones during the day, others do utilize them until late at night. Notably, the Covid-19 outbreak had caused children and youth to use their phones more frequently and away from their parents' watchful eyes. The survey also found that some children experienced online abuse and unpleasant experiences, including seeing improper content online, being approached by strangers in chat rooms and social networking sites, experiencing cyberbullying, and having their images circulated online without their consent. This demonstrates that the internet is a risky environment for kids.

In terms of proactive approaches conducted among students during the 2 years of the pandemic, the PCMN (2022) pushed for the establishment of a Human Trafficking Prevention Education Program that all children and youth need to be taught about online safety through school- and community-based initiatives. This initiative was included as an amendment to the Anti-Trafficking in Persons Act. This educational workshop uses age-appropriate materials to cover all facets of trafficking. PCMN has advocated for the inclusion of elementary kids in the program, as the initial proposal exclusively focused on the youth, as OSEC is a form of trafficking that targets younger victims. Children are more likely to be informed, protected, and empowered if this is implemented countrywide through DepEd and the LGUs.

Certain cultural beliefs are contributing factors to the proliferation of OSAEC in the Philippines: a) if the children are untouched, they are not harmed; b) OSAEC provides easy money and almost everyone does it; c) children are expected to help the family financially; d) one should not interfere in the affairs of other families; and e) technology is only for the younger generation to learn (UNICEF 2021). While the recent studies of IJM and UNICEF highlight some of the key information of the phenomenon of OASEC in the Philippines as a family-based crime, it is important to think critically about what are internal and external risk factors that make some Filipino families susceptible or more at risk than others to be involved in OSAEC. It is evident that more research needs to be done to develop an in-depth understanding of the contextual and situational risk factors affecting OSAEC families to prevent and respond to OSAEC as a family-based crime with a focus on the parents as co-facilitators.

Pertinent legal frameworks related to OSAEC

Republic Act 11930, also known as the Anti-Online Sexual Abuse and Exploitation of Children (OSAEC) Law, marks the beginning of safer online environments for children (Moaje, 2022). According to the Child Rights Network (CRN), new laws represent a win for all child advocates and supporters who worked to pass historic legislation that would safeguard Filipino children and dispel the notion that the nation is one of the most hazardous countries for kids to access the internet.

Objective of the Study

Data from the mapped actors combating OSAEC provide an overview about the initial factors commonly associated with the said crime. It thus lays more ground-work on the nature of OSAEC and how to prevent this crime and thus the psychosocial and mental health impact. This is where this current paper aims to shed more light. It is hoped to broaden the nature of understanding and discourse to build effective prevention services that focus on the family members as facilitators and victims.

These understandings are aimed at providing grounded data upon which a model can be designed about the nature of OSAEC in the country that focuses on the parent as the facilitator. This is hoped to guide social and community workers, mental health professionals, and law enforcers in proactively preventing further occurrences of OSAEC in the country.

Research Questions

The following questions guided the research to understand the parent as a co-facilitator of OSAEC:

What is the nature of OSAEC as experienced and perceived by involved Filipino family members who are co-facilitators and their service providers and how can the data be used to construct a psychosocial and/or systems-based model in further understanding OSAEC to prevent and treat its impact on families?

Specifically, it asks:

A. What are the internal risk factors of Filipino families to OSAEC

- Personality traits
- Sentiments towards OSAEC
- Belief system
- Perceived needs

B. What are the external risk factors of Filipino family members who are co-facilitators to OSAEC

- Economic
- Political
- Social / Religious
- Technological
- Environmental

C. What are the family dynamics of those involved in OSAEC?

Significance

The output of this study is deemed significant both in the international and national literatures in OSAEC as there is currently a considerable dearth of information that focus on the family member facilitator. Understanding it from the grassroots would enable a research-based body to craft proactive responses to prevent its further occurrence. Similarly, it will aid mental health practitioners like psychologists, counselors, and most especially social workers who are doing the groundwork on this case to better prevent and handle OASEC both for the perpetrator-facilitators and victim-survivors. Lastly, the outcome of this study can guide law makers to craft responsive legislative measures against OSAEC and thus also guide law enforcers in properly implementing such for the betterment of all involved parties; that is, a legislation that is aimed at implementing psychosocially informed treatment procedures for both the perpetrator-facilitators and victim-survivors alike.

Limitations

The sensitivity of the questions and the project timeline allowed only 2 respondents. Thus, no generalizations could be made.

Theoretical Framework

Given that an individual's growth is influenced by the entire ecological system in which a person grows, this study was driven by Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1994). The child interacts with perpetrators over an extended period, which is part of the *microsystem*, which is the first subsystem. The second subsystem, the *mesosystem*, is concerned with how the relationships between the family and the victim's peers, the peer group and the school, and the family and the offender affect the victim's development. The third subsystem is the *exosystem*, which includes social services that support the development of the child victim as well as the connections between the family and the area (community, business sector, NGOs, remittance centers, telecommunication firms). The fourth system is the *macrosystem*, which includes the child victim's local economy, laws, values, religion, belief system, way of life, social norms, and usage of technology. The final system is the *chronosystem*, which considers change or continuity through time in both the developing child and his or her environment. achievements and setbacks in the family (parents starting new jobs, starting a new school, parents divorcing, a family member passing away, etc.) or advancements in the nation (advancement in technology, promotion of social media, promotion of tourism).

According to the ecological systems theory, a person's development is viewed as a complex system of relationships that are influenced by a range of environmental factors, from the child's immediate home and school environments to more general cultural values, laws, and practices. The relationship between the person and their immediate environment as well as the larger environment must be examined to research a person's development.

In relation to this study and in addition to learning about the efforts made to provide justice, intervention, and ultimately, the reintegration of the victim-survivors and perpetrator-facilitators into their respective communities, regardless of the type of abuse and exploitation they may have experienced, attention was paid to identifying what steps or actions are pursued in raising awareness about child sexual abuse and exploitation online. Each actor's tasks and obligations were defined in the framework. The connections between organizations and actors—or the lack thereof—was built to get a broad understanding of how they function and perhaps relate to one another. To find and implement solutions that stop child exploitation and online sexual abuse, gaps in the relationships were also identified.

Figure 1. *The theoretical paradigm of the study.*

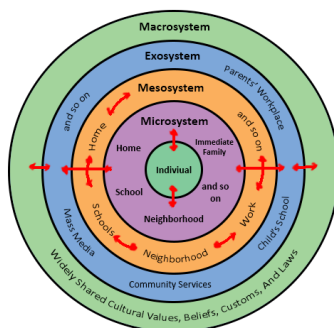


Image reference: https://psychology.fandom.com/wiki/Bioecological_model

Conceptual Framework

OSAEC is a contemporary crime-based phenomenon that besets the collective wellbeing of families involved. However, there is not enough literature available to shed full understanding about its nature: why and how do parents willfully place their children in harm's way? Specific internal and external risk factors are the aims for investigation that might render certain Filipino families susceptible to committing OSAEC. While poverty and lack of proper education, both as internalizing and externalizing factors, can be argued as factors putting certain families at risk to OSAEC, most Filipino families who qualify as such do not fall victims to OSAEC; hence, this study. Describing the investigated family dynamics of involved Filipino families, their interrelationship as a collective system, could shed light into the nature of OSAEC as a family-based criminal phenomenon.

Through this gathered data and new-found understanding of OASEC, intervention schemes will be drawn. More specifically, it aims to craft a model of understanding the susceptibility of Filipino families to committing OSAEC to boost the preventive capacities of authorities handling such phenomenon with the purpose to craft preventative social and mental health frameworks for vulnerable Filipino families to OSAEC needs consistency. This is to improve the existing collective wellbeing of all family members such that they can increase their personal capabilities to resist involvement in OSAEC.

Method

Research Design

This study utilized a qualitative research case study design where the central focus was the collection of first-hand accounts of the phenomenon being investigated through open-ended and conversational communication.

As approaches for acquiring data, key informant interviews (KIIs) and document reviews were used. The transcripts of the interviews were examined using a qualitative methodology to identify themes that described the various facets and settings of the individual situations of the child victims.

Participants

The goal of the study was to interview 20 individuals, including 10 parents or first-degree relatives who facilitated OSAEC and 10 service providers. Based on the latest systematic study on empirical test for qualitative studies, “empirical data reached saturation within a narrow range of interviews (9–17) or focus group discussions (4–8), particularly those with relatively homogenous study populations and narrowly defined objectives” (Hennick & Kaiser, 2022). Ultimately, the study was able to interview only 2 parent facilitators and 1 service provider for reasons stated below.

The inclusion criteria for the parent perpetrator-facilitators were parent facilitators, currently incarcerated in the Bureau of Corrections with no ongoing/pending case trial so that research activities would not interfere with any current legal process, had full direct disclosure about the abuse, and had the intellectual capacity to develop insight. Regarding emotional readiness, the participant would need to have no ongoing psychiatric treatment for issues such as depression, Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), suicide ideation, etc., would have no likely negative impact (of involvement in research activities) on any therapeutic/support work, and had the ability to regulate emotions (i.e., can express himself freely).

The inclusion criteria for the service provider were that the participant had to be a Staff of Bureau of Corrections and rehabilitation centers, has direct involvement with the cases at hand, had full direct disclosure about the abuse, had intellectual/emotional capacity for insight-making, and could express freely.

Recruitment Process

The number of available participants was limited and thus not random. The list of qualified participants provided by the Bureau of Corrections was 13 incarcerated parent facilitators. The list was extremely limited as well as transient; that is, once selected, potential participants might be moved to another facility.

The researcher met with 13 potential respondents. Of these, only 2 incarcerated mothers agreed to be interviewed. While this does not allow for any valid generalizations, the case studies and interviews are believed to provide insights into continued research with a focus on the parent facilitator as the offender. The interviews included 1 service provider.

Interviews were held in a safe space for open communication, and were comfortable with sufficient lighting, ventilation, and, most importantly, privacy. For those willing to be interviewed, the entirety of the informed consent form was read and discussed in Filipino. All questions and concerns were entertained and responded to up to its fullest information until the participant was fully clarified and assured. Once all of these were achieved, they were asked to tick and sign the informed consent form, as guided accordingly.

During the period of consent and the interview, only the researchers and the given participants at the time were allowed to be in the room. Each interview lasted approximately 30-45 minutes. Each interview was recorded.

Following the completion of all interviews, each interviewee reviewed and approved their interview data analysis for “member checking” as one of the ways in triangulating the qualitative data gathered and analyzed.

Study Locale

Study locales were in the Bureau of Corrections and child-protection centers in National Capital Region specifically in Muntinlupa City.

Research Team

The group of researchers who conducted the study and safeguarded the participants from any possible harm the study might cause were established professionals from the Center for the Prevention and Treatment of Child Sexual Abuse (CPTCSA), consisting of doctorate holders and licensed professionals in the fields of clinical social work, psychology, guidance and counseling, and psychometrics.

The study also employed 3 data encoders/transcribers who signed the non-disclosure agreement to protect data integrity. These encoders and/or transcribers are undergraduate students of psychology under the guidance, mentorship, and supervision of the principal researcher.

Instrumentation

The study used an *unstructured interview guide* for all participants based on the identified statements of the problems. These are general open-ended questions designed to stir their ideas and experiences of OSAEC. Follow-up questions were based on their answers to the main questions. Hence, an open discussion and free conversation of their experiences with OSAEC was facilitated.

Data Analysis

This study utilized a case study approach to deeply investigate specific incidents or contexts of abuse from the perspective of the facilitators. This qualitative method involved in-depth examination of individual cases to uncover patterns, causal mechanisms, and contextual factors that might not be evident through broader quantitative methods. By focusing on rich, detailed narratives, case studies provide nuanced

insights into the complex dynamics of OSAEC, including the roles of technology, perpetrator behavior, victim vulnerabilities, and systemic gaps in protection.

Trustworthiness of the gathered data was established through peer debriefing and member checking.

Ethics

The study followed the National Ethics Committee standard operating procedures.

Results

Part I: Social Case History

Participant 1: Abigail

Abigail is 39 years old and was committed on April 2, 2024, at the Bureau of Jail Management and Penology Angeles City Jail – Female Dormitory, Angeles City, Pampanga due to the violations of R.A. 7610 (Special Protection of Children Against Child Abuse, Exploitation, and Discrimination), Violations of R.A. 11862 (Anti-human Trafficking), Violations of R.A. 11930 (Cybercrime Prevention Act of 2012) & Violations of Section 4(a) of RA 11930 (Anti-Online Sexual Abuse or Exploitation of Children Act and Anti-Child Sexual Abuse of Exploitation Materials Act). Abigail's arrest happened on March 6, 2024. She recollected that around 7 to 8 pm of that day, she was having the usual chat with her US-based client who then called about their transactions. When she answered the call, the police operatives immediately entered forcefully in their house. Her husband was not around the time of the incident as he was still working; only her 2 children were with her. She believes that the US-based client gave her information to the authorities.

Abigail was the eldest among 7 siblings consisting of 5 boys and 2 girls. She is very close to her brothers and sisters as she practically served as their mother and father at the same time since their parents passed away during their tender years. Her father was a plumber who died when she was just 11 years old, and her mother was a housewife selling *kakanin* and doing laundries for other people who died 2 years after her father. Her parent's businesses weren't enough to sustain their family's daily living. She recollected that both of her parents inconspicuously sold and pushed illicit drugs – methamphetamine hydrochloride, commonly called "shabu", to support their family. Both of her parents died of terminal illnesses.

Abigail seems to be generally gregarious and cheerful in dealing with people around her. She never used illicit drugs and had no history of any mental disorder in her families. Despite the history of drug pushing in her early family circumstances, there were no prior criminal record in any of her family members. In terms of her own family, she eloped with her unmarried husband when she was just 15 years old and

parents of 4 children; the only boy is 21 and the girls 18, 14, and 12 years old. She lived in an extended family with her husband and 2 children and her parents and grandparents. Her other 2 children live in their paternal relatives nearby to ease in their schooling. Despite living separately, they stay close together and has daily communication. Her maternal relative also lives very nearby to their house.

There was no significant history of abuse disclosed by Abigail. Familial relationships were relatively intact and functional except in handling their finances. She was very close with her children and had a relatively good and satisfying marital relationship. She describes her husband as loving and caring to her and their children. Though her husband was naturally angry upon discovering her crimes, he offered understanding and continued support to her throughout her ordeal, and he constantly visits her. She has a good relationship with extended family members, especially with her cousin who introduced her to this line of work.

Abigail finished high school with a satisfactory performance. Coupled with her early family establishments, she was unable to secure stable jobs that can sustain their family needs. Joan does not have a stable job and thus no steady source of income, neither his husband. She worked as a canteen and arcade attendant irregularly since she also need to juggle attending to her ailing 98-year-old maternal grandfather as a caregiver where she also earned some money from her relatives from time to time. Her husband on the other hand is a tricycle driver who just rented the vehicle from somebody else. Together, they only earned a combined daily wage of 500 pesos and their daily family expenses is doubled to a thousand pesos. This brings major financial problem to their family.

This financial strain has forced her to engage in cyber activities where she initially started by attending the arcade shop where she's working on a part-time basis. One of her cousins introduced her to such activities. She mentioned that she has observed her *Kuya*, the gay older cousins, together with some other people, doing some sorts of an online business. Curious, and invited by her *Kuya*, she welcomes the idea of joining them with a promise of a better job and economic payout. She quickly learned the business and earned around Php60,000 per client. This enticed her to continue the job despite her knowledge that it should be kept discreet.

It was around December 2023 when Abigail started participating her children in transactions. The desire to buy Christmas gifts was a motivator to engage the children, the 2 youngest girls among the 4 children, in her "shows". She mentioned that it's just a simple hi and hello to the "*mers*" – their colloquial term for customers. She argues that her children know about her cyber work because she often goes to their relatives' arcade in full make-up and costumes. This is unknown to her husband who if often outside driving his tricycle around their city to help make both ends meet. She mentioned that her children even shared amazement in her preparations and even interest in joining her "shows" wearing fancy make up and grandiose clothing and accessories. This then opened her more opportunities to get closer with 2 of her children – the 3rd and 4th ones, as it served as their bonding moments. She argued that they even understood why she needed to do this in the very first place, and why they needed to help her in doing it too.

Despite this, Abigail argued that her relatives from both sides did not misjudge her and are not angry at her because of what she has done. She asserted that they understood what she has had to do for her family. She believes that they remain supportive, caring, and loving to her and they continue to help and support her children. However, in terms of her perspectives, she understands the gravity of her charges but fails to recognize how serious what she has committed. She mentioned that she has accepted her situation already and seeks forgiveness to her children. She argues that people around her need to understand that her crime was not heinous as prostitution or murder and she could not understand why people judge her when in fact, she never killed nor prostituted anybody. As one of her goals, she plans to continue taking care of her children and focus more on earning money in honorable ways.

Abigail seems to be adjusting well in her current situation. She displayed conviction in sharing her stories and recognized how much she has caused her children some pain and trauma. However, she doesn't seem to fully comprehend the extent of her actions against the psychological health of her children since she strongly believes that an online work is relatively harmless compared to an actual prostitution. The follow-up interviews with Abigail affirmed the veracity of the information extracted from the interviews conducted with her about the nature of OSAEC as she has experienced it. She posted some clarifications during the triangulation procedure which were incorporated and duly explained.

Participant 2: Beatrice

Beatrice is a 33-year-old mother committed at Bureau of Jail Management and Penology (BJMP) Angeles City Jail – Female Dormitory, Angeles City, Pampanga on May 7, 2024 with the following charges: violations of Section 4(a) of RA 11930 (Anti-Online Sexual Abuse or Exploitation of Children Act and Anti-Child Sexual Abuse of Exploitation Materials Act) and violations of Section 4(a) of RA 9208 (Anti-Trafficking in Persons Act of 2003). Beatrice was first committed to CIDG facility in Metro Manila for one month before she was transferred to BJMP Angeles City. Towards the end of the interview, Beatrice was already sentenced 21 years and shall then be transferred to Bureau of Corrections in Mandaluyong City.

Beatrice was the 4th of 8 siblings of 2 girls and 6 boys from an impoverished family. Growing up in a dumpsite, her parents earned a living by trading trashes that can still be useful or recyclable and her father was occasionally sidelining as a gardener. She remembers vividly living in a poor condition which continued until she got married at the age of 17. Her husband also works in the dumpsite and as a garbage collector in their city government. They had 5 children of 3 boys ages 15, 10, and 6, and 2 girls ages 14 and 4, respectively. She was most of the time a housewife and would occasionally sell some foods to aid in their daily expenses. She is forced to become a fulltime mother because her children, especially her youngest, is often sick which always adds to their financial strains.

Beatrice lived in a nuclear family with her husband and 3 children: their other 2 children aged 15 and 6 live with their parental relatives. Beatrice would have had a small store she ran but was unable to sustain due to the very low income it generated and her need to tend to her sickly children. There was no noteworthy history of abuse revealed. Except for managing their cash, family connections were largely intact and operational. She had a reasonably happy and fulfilling marriage before she was incarcerated and was quite close to her kids. She used to get along well with her extended relatives before her commitment to prison. Her husband and relatives were fully unaware of her crime. Her family and extended families had no documented histories of substance addiction nor mental illness.

Her husband's work as a junk vendor was equally unable to provide for the needs of their family. Due to this, she opted to get loans from multiple sources until she was loaded with hefty amounts she could [no longer afford to pay anymore](#). This is where she decided to enter the online business since her neighborhood were into it for some time already. She mentioned that her neighbor was the one who introduced her in doing chat businesses with foreigners and extort them some money. She would pretend to be someone else and would scam them for money. She said that she started this work when she was just 18 years old, and it went on for 2 years until she stopped it because of her conscience, she argued.

Beatrice was a high school graduate with a satisfactory performance from a public school and is a Born Again Christian. This limits her capacity to secure good paying jobs to meet her family's needs. For the past 5 years before her incarceration, she hasn't had any stable job other than selling some foods every now and then. As a person, Beatrice appears to be timid and reserved but she easily gets along with her mates. She is soft spoken and avoids eye contact all throughout the series of interviews. Based on her words, she never used nor even tried illicit substances and there was no history of mental health disorders in the family. However, during the multiple visits and interviews, she appears to have symptoms of depression due to her current conditions – she asserted that she hasn't fully accepted yet her situation. Prior to her incarceration, she didn't have any prior criminal records.

Although Beatrice is aware of the seriousness of her allegations, she is unaware of the extent of her offence. Her current inability to completely accept her current situation rest on her obligation for motherhood as she argued that her youngest child is still very young which she still needs to nurse over. Asserted that she loves her children more than anything and mentioned she needs her children to understand it, contrary to what their relatives are telling them against her. She intends to keep caring for her kids and concentrate more on making money in morally righteous ways after serving her years.

Overall, towards the end of the interviews, Beatrice seemed to be coping well with her current circumstances in spite of her gloomy mood most of the time. She acknowledged the stress and sorrow she had caused her kids. However, because she firmly feels that an internet job is more innocuous than actual prostitution, she doesn't appear to completely understand the magnitude of her activities against her children's psychological health. The information gleaned from Beatrice's interviews regarding the nature of OSAEC as she has experienced it was confirmed to be accurate by the follow-up interviews. During the triangulation process, she posted some clarifications, which were taken into account and well explained.

Part II: Nature of OSAEC based on the Parent Facilitator's Perspectives.

Internal Risk Factors

Internal risk factors are those that originate from within the facilitator's own functioning, whether they are aware of them or not and are believed to drive them in facilitating OSAEC.

Personality Traits. Based solely on the description and observation of the *service provider* of the facilitators of OSAEC, Clarence, a service provider with access to both women, referred to them as "*tahimik sila dito sa loob (they are quiet inside)*", suggesting social withdrawal and isolation. He noted that they tend to avoid interactions with other Persons Deprived of Liberty (PDLs), particularly those accused of different crimes like drug offenses "*siguro dahil siguro sa, ano, yung sa nature ng kaso nila... siguro nahihiya sila*" (*Maybe because of the nature of their case... maybe they feel ashamed*). There seems to be an implicit understanding that OSAEC-related offenses carry a different social stigma compared to other crimes, affecting the behavior of the accused. These observations of Clarence were shared by the consultant researcher who also observed both Abigail and Beatrice to be timid, generally speaking. Though Abigail appeared to be more gregarious than Beatrice, both displayed reserved demeanors throughout the interview and argued that they believe the people around them tend to misjudge them against the gravity of their offenses.

Affect toward OSAEC. Abigail experienced internal conflicts regarding her actions. She acknowledged guilt and expressed regret, particularly about the impact on her children. This theme captured her struggle with morality, legality, and personal survival.

Justification versus guilt. Abigail argued that hardship in life forced her to engage in OSAEC "*Kagipitan at saka, tinutulungan ko din po kasi mga kapatid ko eh. Kaya nahirapan sila na makapagtrabaho kasi hindi sila nag-aral (In times of hardship, I also help my siblings. It's difficult for them to find work because they didn't go to school)*". She was aware that what she had been doing was wrong "*De pag ganon nababalitaan namin, kahit sa TV pag may commercial... nag I-lay low po kaming magpipinsan non (When we hear about things like that, even on TV during commercials... my cousins and I would lay low during those times)*" but she didn't stop doing it "*hindi po, binawasan ko pero nandon pa rin ang engagement ko sa chat (No, I reduced it, but I still stay engaged in the chat)*". When she started doing it for the first time, she felt afraid and cautious, but she bore it all for her children's education "*Yung takot kami magutom... iniingatan ko na hindi malaman ng asawa ko... para makapag-aral ang mga anak ko (The fear of going hungry... I make sure my husband doesn't find out... so that my children can continue their studies)*". Despite this, she still felt guilty about her actions "*Pinagsisihan ko po yung ganyan... gu-guilty ako sa ginagawa ko syempre (I regret that... of course, I feel guilty for what I'm doing)*". Realizing the consequences of the psychological burden of involving her children, Abigail expressed regret and

acknowledged the moral implications of her actions. While she initially justified her decisions for survival, she later recognized the weight of her choices. However, she still did some rationalization versus her guilt to what she had done *"Pinagsisisihan ko yung anak ko. Pero hindi ko naman sila pinipilit na hindi nila gusto...Kala ko okay lang yung lahat na nangyayari, na hindi ko alam na mali na pala (I regret what happened with my child. But I never forced them to do anything they didn't want... I thought everything was okay, not realizing that it was actually wrong)"*.

Beatrice also justified her actions with financial necessity but admitted to feeling guilt and seeking justification for her actions. She insisted that the crime she committed was a "one-time only" instance *"Ano, sa... sabi po, para pong, ano, isa—yung isang bes—, yung isang... isang beses ko nalang gagawin nangako ako ganun po ("Uh, well... I said, like, uh... just one—just one time... I promised it would be the last time)"*. However, it is important to note that her case had a final sentence of 21 years in prison; hence, this "one-time only" claim must be taken with a grain of salt. Further, the realization of the severity of her actions came only after legal consequences, revealing the moral dissonance between necessity and ethics *"Ayaw ko... Parang ayaw ko ng... nakokonsensya naman po ako... (I don't want to... It feels like I don't want to anymore... I feel guilty)"*.

Emotional burden and remorse. In her few months of incarceration, Abigail felt sorry for what she had done *"Hihingi po ako ng tawad... dahil sa'kin, sira ang buhay nila... Kung kailan nila ako kayang patawarin, maghihintay ako ("I will ask for forgiveness... because of me, their lives are ruined. I will wait for as long as it takes for them to forgive me)"*. Beatrice also expressed regret and justified her decisions with financial necessity but admitted guilt in her actions, particularly in exploiting her child's privacy. She felt very sad about what she had done *"Pag napag-uusapan yung kaso ko... Pag-pag po na, lagi pong... naiyak po talaga ko kapag naaalala ko ("When my case is talked about... every time... I always end up crying whenever I remember it)"*. She argued that she will spend the remaining years she has to serve in prison asking for her children's forgiveness to caught out in her guilt and regret *"Sana mapatawad niya ko sa ginawa ko sa kanya... Yung dapat kasama ko sila ngayon... Hindi po ako nag-sasawang humingi ng tawad ("I hope they forgive me for what I did... I should be with them right now... I never get tired of asking for forgiveness)"*. Beatrice shared the emotional toll of her actions on her family, especially due to her husband being sick about which she could not do anything about it since she was incarcerated. This brought her to tears during one of the interview sessions.

Further, the service provider, Clarence, observed that the facilitators showed visible signs of regret: *"Lagi silang malungkot... nakikita mo rin sa kanila Sir na nagsisisi sila doon sa ginagawa nila." (They are always sad... you can see that they regret what they did)"*. Their emotional responses during family visits and court hearings reinforce their remorse. This finding highlights the potential for rehabilitation if proper psychological interventions are provided.

The Psychological and Emotional Conflict of their Crime. Beatrice struggled with self-forgiveness and expressed regret and internal conflict about her actions *“Nakokonsensya... kaso ano eh, yung, tambak kasi yung utang ko... Nagi-guilty ako kaso no choice lang nga... para sa kanila rin yung ginagawa ko (I feel guilty... but the thing is, my debts are piling up... I do feel guilty, but I have no choice... I'm doing this for them too)”*. She had a problem reconciling her decision to commit the crime despite their needs to survive during that time *“Sa konting halaga dapat ‘di ko ginawa ‘yon, guma-wa na lang ako ng ibang paraan (For a small amount of money, I shouldn’t have done that. I should have found another way)”*. Though she initially justified a conflicted argument to her crime, she finally understood the gravity of what she had done *“Yun po, dapat po hindi ko inano yung mga anak ko... Sana po wala na pong ano... huminto na po yung ano... [referring to OSAEC] (Yes, I should not have involved my children... I hope it stops... I hope it all ends)”*.

Belief System. To the service provider, Clarence, the denial and justification of their crime is quite common among many if not all the facilitators of OSAEC. Many of them initially deny their involvement *“Di daw nila alam na bawal ganon” (They claim they didn’t know it was illegal – so the question is, did they not think it would harm their child?)”*. They claim they were unaware that they were engaging with law enforcement during entrapment operations. There is an apparent disconnect between moral awareness and legal knowledge. Further, they tend to have a twisted belief that their crime is “less serious” compared to other offenses like prostitution or murder:

Abigail: Yung makikita mo sa datingan pa lang ng galaw nila, alam na alam mo yung [negative tingin sa amin]... Mag salita, kung paano sila mag salita... Akala mo kung naka-kuha kami ng buhay... nakapatay kami... Parang kami na yung pinaka masamang tao (Just from the way they move, you can already tell [they look at us negatively]... The way they talk, how they speak... It's like they think we took someone's life... like we killed someone... As if we're the worst people in the world”.

This ideation is shared by Beatrice, which in turn tended to downplay in their consciousness and perspective the actual gravity of OSAEC, much more so its long-lasting impact on the victims.

Perceived Needs. Perceived needs sprung from the realizations that they have committed wrongdoings especially against their children and families and the desire to learn from these mistakes. When asked if there were anything they would change in the past, Abigail mentioned *“Tatangalin ko ‘yung kalakaran na ganitong trabaho sa pamilya at mga kamag-anak ko... [hindi ko ala mano tawag dun]... pero alam ko na ngayon na mali ang naging desisyon ko (“I will put an end to this kind of work in my family and among my relatives... [I don’t know what to call it]... but now I know that my decision was wrong)”*.

Hopes for their Children's Future. The women acknowledge their mistakes and hope to build better lives after their incarceration especially for their children. As Abigail said, *"Kung makakasama ko pa sila, ipapamulat ko sa kanila, na mali yung ginagawa namin noon. Na wag na nilang sundan pa ngayon, na sa buhay nila ("If I could still be with them, I would make them realize that what we did before was wrong. That they shouldn't follow the same path in their lives now)".*

Desire for Redemption and Second Chances. Despite everything, Abigail and Beatrice expressed their desires for redemption. Throughout the interview, Abigail reflected on her past decisions and expressed a desire to change. She spoke about her newfound awareness and the lessons learned, emphasizing her hope for a better future post-incarceration *"Makipagsapalaran ng normal. Kahit mahirap, kahit mag-fail, subukan lang nang subukan na mamuhay nang marangal (Take the risk of living a normal life. Even if it's hard, even if you fail, just keep trying to live with dignity)".* Beatrice also claimed that she will do her best to wean back her children in forgiving her to what she has done *"Ano lagi nalang po ako humihingi ng sorry sakanila pati po sa asawa ko... hindi po ako nagsasawang humingi ng tawad ("I keep asking for their forgiveness, even from my husband... I never get tired of asking for forgiveness)".*

Aspirations for Legal and Sustainable Livelihoods. On top of what they learned on personal notes, Abigail and Beatrice argued that livelihood education and training is one specific that they can apply to earn a fair living. Abigail claimed *"Marami po akong natutunan dito tulad ng mga livelihood na pwedeng mong idala sa laya, na pagkakakitaan. Yung paggawa ng coffee wallets, bayong, at basahan... 'di mo kailangan ng puhunan, pero may kikitain ka (I have learned a lot here, like different livelihoods that I can take with me when I'm free to earn a living. Making coffee wallets, bayongs, and rugs... You don't need capital, but you can still earn)".* This would secure them not to go back to illegal activities *"hindi na po... kasi walang labag sa batas ang mga ganitong trabaho (Not anymore... because jobs like these don't break any laws)"* and to fight fairly in life no matter how difficult it may be *"Makipagsapalaran ng normal. Kahit mahirap, kahit mag-fail, subukan lang nang subukan na mamuhay nang marangal (Take the risk of living a normal life. Even if it's difficult, even if you fail, just keep trying to live honorably)".* This realization to earn a fair living had been emphasized by her learning to become aware of the consequences of actions *"Maging aware sa kada galaw natin sa buhay, huwag basta sugod nang sugod para lang kumita ng pera... para hindi masira ang buhay natin (Be aware of every step we take in life. Don't just rush into things just to earn money... so that we don't ruin our lives)".*

Beatrice similarly has taken steps toward rehabilitation by learning welding and exploring other skill-building activities like baking as possible sources of fair income post-incarceration,

"Nag-aaral po ako. Well, at least po paglaya ko pwede po. Nakapag-graduate na po ako dito ng welding. At least, mhm, lumaya na po ako, magagamit ko po yun... "At least po kung lumaya na ko, marunong na po ako mag-welding. Pwede na pong pagkakitaan." (I'm studying. Well, at least when I'm free, I can use that skill... I already know how to weld. I can use it to earn a living)."

"Pwede po akong mag-bake. Ano po, tumitingin-tingin po ako ganun po pag nag-babake sila, siguro po sa lilipatan ko, dahil ilang taon po akong, gusto ko po matutunan, at least po pag nakalabas po ako, marami po akong pwedeng pagka-abalahan, pagkakitaan po ('I can bake. I watch when they bake, and I observe. Maybe in the place I'll move to, since I've wanted to learn for years. At least when I get out, I'll have many things to keep me busy and ways to earn a living)'"

Beatrice sees vocational training to reintegrate into society post-incarceration. She aspires to rebuild her relationship with her children and redeem herself through responsible parenting,

"Ano, ano po, mamahalin ko po yung anak ko,aalagaan ko po. Bibigay ko po yung oras na sana magkasama kami ngayon. Na... dapat ako yung nag-aalaga sakanila, kumbaga po babawi po ako sakani-ya... At saka, hinding hindi ko na po uulitin po yung ginawa ko po ('I will love and take care of my children. I will give them the time we should have had together. I should have been the one taking care of them. In a way, I will make it up to them... And I will never, ever do what I did again)'"

The Need for Holistic Growth and Structured Rehabilitation Programs. Both Abigail and Beatrice share the desire to repair their relationships with their children and rebuild their lives. They turned to spirituality as a coping mechanism, as Beatrice claimed *"Ano kasi ngayon eh, pinagpepray ko nalang po. Na, Lord tulungan moko, pigilan mo ko, ganun po, na hindi ko na magawa, makagawa ulit ng masama. Saka po yung pag-ano ko kay Lord, naging closer po ('Now, I just pray. I say, 'Lord, help me, stop me,' so that I won't do anything wrong again. And through this, I have grown closer to God)".* Moreover, Clarence suggested that solving the problem at the level of facilitators might prevent victimization *"Kung masosolusyonan natin yung problema ni perpetrator, siguro 'di tayo aabot sa ganon (If we can solve the perpetrator's problem, we may not reach this point)".* The discussion with him as a service provider for the facilitators of OSAEC highlighted that they, in some cases, may also be considered victims of systemic poverty and lack of opportunities *"Hindi lang puro biktima ang pokus natin" (We should not only focus on victims)".* This suggests the need for preventive measures, economic support, and rehabilitation programs rather than purely punitive approaches. This kind of holistic approach in addressing OSAEC was affirmed by Abigail. *"Malaki pong tulong yung mga activities na yon... madagdagan pa po yung mga activities para po kung makalaya po mayron pong mga pagkakakitaan, hindi na po babalik sa mga dating mga Gawain ('Those activities are a big help... There should be more activities so that when we are released, we have ways to earn a living and won't go back to our old ways)".*

External factors are the various factors beyond the personal control of the facilitators of OSAEC that beset their situation and thus precipitated them to engage in the crime.

Socio-economic. The overall destitute situation of both Abigail and Beatrice was a major factor for engaging in the crime and thereby offending their children. One of the primary themes emerging from the interview was the struggle for financial stability. Abigail detailed her impoverished background, describing how her family survived through informal labor and, at times, illegal activities. She explained that the limited job opportunities and informal employment she has had due to economic hardship pushed her into cyber activities that ultimately led to her incarceration *“Kagipitan at saka, tinutulungan ko din po kasi mga kapatid ko eh. Kaya nahirapan sila na makapagtrabaho kasi hindi sila nag-aral (It was out of hardship, and I was also helping my siblings. They had a hard time finding work because they didn’t go to school)”*. Her need to support family members especially her children served as a driving force in her unfortunate decision to engage in cybersex activity *“Gusto ko lang yung bastat gusto ko lang makapag tapos ng pag-aaral yung... mga anak ko, na makapag aral sila, yung hanggang kaya ko sila kung saan sila mapag-aral, mapag-aral (I just want my children to finish their studies, for them to get an education. As long as I can support them, I will do whatever it takes to send them to school)”*. A dominant theme in the interview was Abigail’s financial struggles and her attempts to provide for her family *“Kasi wala akong trabaho nun, kasi yung asawa ko nag-seservice lang siya. Yung hindi sapat yung kinikita, pero tinatry ko rin naman na, makapaghanap pa ng iba pang... pano, yung diskarte? (Because I didn’t have a job back then, and my husband was only doing service work. What he earned wasn’t enough, but I still tried to find other ways... you know, ways to make ends meet)”*. She recounted how poverty and a lack of stable employment opportunities pushed her into various means of earning, including online sex work, disregarding the danger and wrongness of her activities *“Na kahit na alam ko naman na may—maraming option na iba... na maraming option na pag-pipilian na pwedeng kumita ng pera, nabulag siguro ako, kasi dun mas madaling kumita ng pera (“Even though I knew there were many other options—many different ways to earn money—I guess I was blinded because that was the easiest way to make money)”*.

On a similar note, Beatrice’s background revealed a life of economic hardship, growing up in a family of eight siblings with parents engaged in informal work such as scavenging and gardening. The financial strain continued into adulthood, as her husband, a garbage collector, struggled with work due to health issues *“Yung pong asawa ko po nun po nagkasakit po siya hindi po siya nakapagtrabaho... Kasi po kung mangungutang... magtatrabaho nalang po ako (“My husband got sick at that time and couldn’t work... Because if I were to take on debt, I might as well just work instead)”*.

Economic desperation pushed Beatrice into engaging in fraudulent online activities (scamming) and later into more severe offenses

"Pero hindi ko po talaga ginusto 'yun gawin. Pinansyal lang po Talaga... Kasi po kung wala naman pong nag-ooffer ng mga ganiyan, wala naman pong kakapit sa patalim, kagaya po ng pera, na-nasisilaw po... Easy money po kasi siya (But I never really wanted to do it. It was purely because of financial struggles... Because if no one was offering things like that, no one would be desperate enough to resort to it. Money can be blinding... It was easy money, after all)".

Beatrice's background revealed a life of economic hardship, growing up with limited educational and job opportunities. She was burdened by debt due to high-interest informal lending systems. Financial struggles, particularly her children's medical needs, pushed her into illicit activities.

"Ahh nabaon kasi ako sa utang kaya, kailangan kong.. ng pera, kaya na ano ako na gawin yun... Pagka minsan nagigipit, pag may sakit yung anak ko. Kasi sakitin... sakitin kasi sila lahat... Halos 'di na 'ko makauwi ng bahay... Ang daming nag-aano sa'kin, nagaabang. Madami akong utang (Ahh, I was buried in debt, so I needed money, which led me to do it... Sometimes, when I was struggling—when my child was sick. Because they get sick often... all of them do. I could barely go home... So many people were after me, waiting. I had so much debt)".

As mothers, both Abigail and Beatrice emphasized that their love for their children was of primary priority for them but was blinded by easy ways of earning money which ironically led to their children's unfortunate victimization. Upon realizing this, they emphasized that they would make things better when they had completed their sentences. Beatrice noted *"Ano, ano po, mamahalin ko po yung anak ko, aalagaan ko po. Bibigay ko po yung oras na sana magkasama kami ngayon ("I will love and take care of my child. I will give them the time that we should have had together)".*

As further validated by the interview with Clarence, he revealed that financial struggles were a common motivation among OSAEC facilitators. *"More on kahirapan po talaga. More on ano Sir, ahh, yun yung way ng ano, ng pamumuhay nila... sa pera po (It's really about poverty. That's their way of living... money)".* The facilitators saw OSAEC as an easier way to earn money compared to other illegal activities *"Mas madali daw 'to kesa sa magbenta ng droga" (They say this is easier than selling drugs)".*

Socio-political. Abigail described her entry into cyber-related activities, influenced by relatives who were engaged in similar work. She initially viewed it as a normal and legitimate means to earn a living but later realized its legal and ethical implications *"...pag ganon nababalitaan namin, kahit sa TV pag may commercial... nag I-lay low po kaming mag-pipinsan non... yung mga nahuhuli... tas tinanggal na namin yung sa computer, hindi na kami nag-computer. Pero hindi na 'ko yung nag sho-show ("Whenever we heard about it, even on TV during commercials... my cousins and I would lay low. When people were getting caught... we removed everything from the computer, stopped using it. But I was no longer the one showing)".*

Societal Perceptions and Stigma. Abigail discussed her perception of judgment from institutional authorities, particularly from authorities and social workers *“Feeling ko [nahuhusgahan ako] sa mga katulad niyo...Sa mga social worker, kasi isa rin kayo sa... pero kayong dalawa hindi, sa mga iba... Yung makikita mo sa datingan pa lang ng galaw nila, alam na alam mo yung...[judgments nila] (I feel like [I'm being judged] by people like you... by social workers, because you're also part of it... but not you two, just the others. You can tell just by the way they act, you can already see [their judgments])”*. However, she contrasted this with the strong support she received from her immediate community and family. *“Kasi, hindi naman po... kung sa tingin niyo masama yung ginawa ko, sa tingin nila, hindi ako naghanapbuhay para sa sarili ko... Actually, sila pa po ang nag-aambag-ambag para mahatiran ako ng pagkain araw-araw (Because, it's not like... if you think what I did was wrong, in their eyes, I wasn't working just for myself... Actually, they're the ones who even pitch in to bring me food every day)”*. The social stigma related to cyber-related offenses they experienced are from the other people and not from their family, as Abigail explained *“Dahil siguro sa kung sino yung mga nasa paligid ko, minamahal ko po sila, pinapa-importantehan ko sila... kaya kahit nalaman nila, hindi nila ako tinalikuran (‘Maybe it's because of the people around me—I love them, and I make them feel important... So even when they found out, they didn't turn their backs on me)’*. She argued that because she is a good person in her family, she is not being judged by them compared to others *“Siguro, kung hindi sila mabuting tao sa pamilya nila, baka hinusgahan sila agad (‘Maybe if they weren't good people to their families, they would have been judged right away)’*”.

Legal and Social Consequences. Both Abigail's and Beatrice's arrests and subsequent legal proceedings led to the separation from their children who were placed under the care of the DSWD. They entered a guilty plea, acknowledging their wrongdoing. Beatrice was sentenced to 23 years of imprisonment. Both expressed their shared frustration with the perceived severity of sentencing compared to other crimes such as homicide, as Beatrice mentioned *“Yun lang, malaking, yung, yung sentensya parang masyadong malaki sa mga kagaya namin, human trafficking. Parang... para ka naring pumatay ng tao (That's it... the sentence is too heavy for people like us—human trafficking. It's like... it's as if you've killed someone)”*. The heaviest burden they carried as a consequence of their offense was being away from their children and family. Beatrice shared *“Nung una po hindi ko matanggap [na malayo na ako sa mga anak ko] iyak po ako ng iyak, araw-araw dun sa Maynila... Sana mapatawad niya ko sa ginawa ko sa kaniya (At first, I couldn't accept [being far from my children]. I cried and cried every day in Manila... I just hope they can forgive me for what I've done to them)”*. Even in the jail itself, they experience the impact of the judgment from the larger society through their fellow detainees, Abigail explained:

“Kasi po nung bago pong lipat palang ako dito, parang na-ano ako sa mga kasamahan na, sinasabi, ‘number one human trafficking, mabigat na kaso ‘yan’. Parang, kesa, para ka ng pumatay... Pero parang po sa nangyari ngayon, parang number one po yung human trafficking na pinaka-mabigat po na kaso (When I was first transferred here, I felt overwhelmed by what others were saying—‘human trafficking is a serious crime, it's one of the worst.’ It's like... as if you've killed someone. And now, it feels like human trafficking is seen as the heaviest crime of all).”

Abigail's experience was like Beatrice's, as her arrest led to the separation from her children, who were placed under DSWD custody. She pleaded guilty and received a 15-year sentence. She faced social stigma, especially from her husband's family. Though her husband now supported her, it was never easy at first *"Nung tumatawag ako sa kanya, sinusumbat niya sa'kin na nawala daw yung mga anak niya... Baka bully-hin din dun sa lugar na yun... kaya gusto na ilipat sila ng asawa ko. (When I called him, he blamed me, saying that he lost his children because of me... He's worried they might be bullied there... That's why he wants to move them)"*. Abigail and Beatrice felt that their experience of stigma associated with their crime was the same as those who committed murder *"Para ka naring pumatay ng tao... parang number one po yung human trafficking na pinaka-mabigat na kaso (It's like I've killed someone... Human trafficking feels like the number one heaviest crime)"*.

Abigail reflected on how society, law enforcement, and her community perceived her actions. While she felt judgment from institutions, her immediate circle continued to support her. *"Feeling ko, sa mga katulad niyo... sa mga social worker, kasi isa rin kayo sa... pero kayong dalawa hindi, sa mga iba... Pero kahit nalaman nila, hindi nila ako tinalikuran ('I feel like, with people like you... with social workers, because you're also part of it... but not you two, just the others... But even when they found out, they didn't turn their backs on me)"*. Joan reflected on the seriousness of human trafficking and child abuse charges *"Dapat maging aware sa kada ginagawa natin... hindi lang sugod nang sugod para kumita ng pera (We should be aware of everything we do... not just rush into things just to make money)"*.

Technological. The technological factor is due to the reason of ease in technological advancement. According to Clarence, a service provider for those who committed the crime, the facilitators of OSAEC often come from lower-income households *"Yung sa baba ng middle stage... parang mga nasa poor section (Those below the middle class... mostly from the poor section)"* who has as easy access to the internet. This accessibility to the internet has contributed to the rise of OSAEC *"Ngayon kahit mahirap ka na may access ka na sa internet. (Now, even poor people have access to the internet)"*. This suggests that financial struggles, combined with increased digital access, contribute to the prevalence of OSAEC in low-income communities. Beatrice suggested stricter control over online platforms that facilitate abuse. She advocated for stronger efforts to hold foreign perpetrators accountable. She explained *"Kung walang mga foreigner na maghahanap ng mga batang—wala rin sigurong matutukso... Halos America yung mga foreigner na naghahanap ng bata ('If there were no foreigners looking for children—then maybe no one would be tempted... Most of the foreigners looking for kids are from America)"*.

Environmental. Beatrice was introduced to online interactions with foreigners through neighbors working in bars engaged in similar activities. *“Marami kasi doon samin na nag sa-cyber sex na trabaho... Syempre easy money bat ‘di ko i-try (There were a lot of people in our area doing cybersex work... Of course, it was easy money, so I thought, why not try it?)”*. Initially engaged in ‘chat scamming’ at the age of sixteen, stopping after marriage, but later returning due to financial distress. The transition from financial fraud to a more serious crime (OSAEC) was influenced by previous exposure to online interactions and economic desperation. *“Na ano lang ako na... yung parang... natukso? Na nagawa ko nga sa anak ko para magkapera (I guess I was... tempted? I ended up involving my own child just to make money)”*. To Beatrice, the foreign clients fueled the demand for illicit content, leading to her deeper involvement.

Abigail described her entry into cyber activities, initially working alone before involving her children. Her initial exposure and recruitment were facilitated by family members who were already working in cybersex activities. She detailed how she was recruited by a cousin and later continued engaging in online work for financial survival.

“May pinsan kasi ako, yung pinsan ko na bakla, nagtatrabaho sila sa Cyber, siya yung nag-offer sakin ng ganon... Ako lang muna. Kasi, nung nagtatrabaho ako sa Marina Arcade lang, dun sa may canteen. Tapos, yun parang nahihirapan akong kumita ng magsusurvive kami, tas hanggang nakita ko yung kuya ko nung pumunta ako sa lola ko hanggang ayun, trinabaho ko na (‘I have a cousin, my gay cousin, who worked in cyber... He was the one who offered me that kind of work. At first, it was just me. Before that, I was working at Marina Arcade, in the canteen. But I was struggling to earn enough for us to survive. Then one day, I saw my older brother when I visited my grandma, and from there, I got into the work)’”.

The normalization of cyber work within Abigail’s environment led to the escalation of her personal involvement to becoming a family participation. Furthermore, Beatrice, believed that growing and living in a destitute community and impoverished environment pushes individuals into exploitation *“Kung hindi siguro nagigipit ang tao, hindi rin matutukso gawin yun (‘If people weren’t struggling, they wouldn’t be tempted to do it)’”*.

Family Dynamics

Close-knit relationships. The interviews with Abigail and Beatrice highlighted close-knit relationships with their families, particularly their children and husbands. Despite their legal troubles, their family continued to support them, indicating strong emotional bonds despite their legal violations against their own family members.

Role as Provider. Abigail emphasized her role as a provider and protector for her family even before she had her own family as a driving force behind her work *“Kagipitan at saka, tinutulungan ko din po kasi mga kapatid ko eh. Kaya nahirapan sila na makapagtrabaho kasi hindi sila nag-aral (It was out of hardship, and I was also helping my siblings. They had a hard time finding work because they didn’t go to school)”*. This tendency of her to provide for her loved ones was also a defining trait of her as a mother which she reckoned as an important factor in her wrongdoing. When asked about how her husband reacted to her actions, she shared *“Iyak po siya nang iyak, humihingi po ako ng tawad. Hindi naman po siya nagagalit kasi nangyari na po daw... Magpakasipag lang daw po ako um... hanggang sa huling hininga niya, tutulungan niya po daw ako (They kept crying while I asked for forgiveness. They weren’t angry because, they said, it had already happened... They just told me to work hard, and that until their last breath, they would help me)”*. Abigail emphasized how her husband is highly supportive of her in spite of it all and that their marital affair is not significantly affected negatively. Similarly, she viewed her relationships with her children as even better than before she was incarcerated *“Sobrang iyak na lang ganon po. Pag nakikita nila ako umiiyak sila... lalo pa silang naging malapit sa akin. Lagi din nilang sinasabi sakin na never naman po daw nila akong kinahiya sa nangyari, magpakatatag daw po ako (They just cried so much. Whenever they saw me cry, they would cry too... but they became even closer to me. They always told me that they were never ashamed of me because of what happened and that I should stay strong)”*. Despite her actions, Abigail emphasized the strong bond within her family and how the close family ties and mutual support among them remained *“Huwag kong isipin na nagagalit sila, hindi sila nagagalit kahit man lang daw sakin. Sobrang mahal na daw nila ako. Gusto na nilang umuwi, para magkakasama sama kami (They told me not to think that they were angry—because they weren’t, not even at me. They said they love me so much. They just want to come home so we can all be together again)”*. She discussed how her children supported her, even expressing willingness to help financially even during the time they are engaging in cyber business. She argued that her children have awareness and involvement in their family’s financial struggles *“Sabi ng anak ko, ‘Ma, wala ka bang mers [customers]? Wag ka ng malungkot, hanap kang mers, para uwi na tayo (My child said, ‘Ma, don’t you have any mers [customers]? Don’t be sad, find some mers so we can go home)’”*. However, she admitted that her 14-year-old daughter who’s a victim in her case, displayed emotional distress by crying during court hearings and was avoiding communication with her. She claimed that the separation from her children remains her greatest regret, affecting her emotional well-being.

Beatrice’s family condition is not as strong as Abigail’s. Her relationships with her family has been strained by her offense. Her children, particularly her 13-year-old, displayed emotional distress *“Nung pong nagkita po kami nung may hearing po ako. Umiiyak lang po siya, tas kinakausap ko po siya, hindi siya, hindi po siya sumasagot, umiiyak lang po (When we saw each other during my hearing, they just kept crying. I tried talking to them, but they didn’t respond—they just kept crying.)”*. Her husband initially reacted with anger *“Yung pong nasa Maynila ako, syempre mo sinumbat, sumbatan niya po ako, mga masasakit po na salita (“When I was in Manila, of course, he*

blamed me... He said painful words to me)". Jojo said that despite this, he continued to provide financial support *"Hindi [na siya galit], dinadalaw niya ko dito, kada Friday... [okay na po kami] Kasi wala naman daw ibang ano, magtutulungan, kami lang (He's not angry anymore. He visits me here every Friday... [We're okay now] because, in the end, there's no one else—we only have each other to rely on)"*. However, she shared her sadness saying that she was unable to consistently talk to her children especially the one she victimized. Only 2 of her children occasionally visit her and she never had a single chance to talk to her 14-year-old offended child. She explained that she will do her best to reconcile with her children *"Ano, ano po, mamahalin ko po yung anak ko, aalagaan ko po. Bibigay ko po yung oras na sana magkasama kami ngayon. Na... dapat ako yung nag-aalaga sakanila, kumbaga po babawi po ako sa kanya... At saka, hinding hindi ko na po uulitin po yung ginawa ko po (I will love my children and take care of them. I will give them the time we should have had together. I should have been the one taking care of them... I will make it up to them... And I will never, ever do what I did again)"*. Jojo mentioned that her in-laws distanced themselves to her and never visited her and they even pushed for a separation between her and her husband.

Summary of the Results

Abigail's story is a complex narrative of survival, ethical dilemmas, familial love, and legal consequences. It highlights the systemic issues surrounding poverty and crime while shedding light on the psychological and social dimensions of her experience. Her reflections serve as valuable insights for legal professionals, social workers, and policy-makers in understanding the human aspects of cyber-related offenses and trafficking cases and serve a valuable lens for understanding the human aspects of online exploitation cases. Abigail's story provides a deep insight into the intersection of poverty, cyber-related offenses, and familial obligations. Her narrative underscored the systemic issues of financial desperation leading to criminal activities, the moral dilemmas individuals face, and the consequences of such choices.

Beatrice's story underscored how economic vulnerability can push individuals into criminal activities. She acknowledged that easy access to online platforms facilitating exploitation is a major issue. She suggested, albeit self-serving, a stricter control over such websites to prevent further victimization and criminal involvement. Her case illustrates the need for more proactive support systems for financially struggling families to prevent such incidents. Her narrative provides insight into the intersection of poverty, digital exploitation, and crime. Her experiences highlight the importance of economic support, digital literacy, and psychological rehabilitation in preventing and addressing cases of online sexual exploitation. While her legal consequences are severe, her rehabilitation efforts and reflections on her actions present an opportunity for learning and policy improvement.

The interview with a service provider with access to both women revealed critical insights into the nature of OSAEC facilitation, their motivations, and the systemic issues contributing to their involvement. The findings emphasized the need for multifaceted interventions addressing both perpetrators and victims, focusing on education, economic opportunities, and rehabilitation programs to break the cycle of exploitation

Discussion

The fact that only 2 women agreed to be interviewed does now allow for any generalizations. However, the findings of this study do provide some information for a deeper understanding of the complex dynamics surrounding Online Sexual Abuse and Exploitation of Children (OSAEC) in the Philippines. The results align with various studies and literature that highlight the interplay of socio-economic, psychological, legal, and technological factors contributing to OSAEC. This discussion will examine these aspects, drawing connections between the case studies and existing literature.

The Ecological Systems Theory of OSAEC

Bronfenbrenner's (1979) Ecological Systems Theory provides a comprehensive framework for understanding the interplay of personal, social, economic, and cultural factors that led Abigail and Beatrice to engage in OSAEC. Their stories highlight the need for interventions at multiple levels—economic support, education, legal reforms, and psychological rehabilitation—to prevent similar cases in the future. Addressing the systemic issues of poverty and digital exploitation is crucial in breaking the cycle of online sexual abuse and exploitation.

Microsystem (Immediate Environment)

At the microsystem level, Abigail and Beatrice's personal relationships played a critical role in shaping their actions. Abigail's close relationship with her children and husband influenced her decision to engage in online sexual abuse and exploitation of children (OSAEC). She justified her actions by believing that she was helping her family financially, even involving her children. Similarly, Beatrice's financial struggles and her role as a mother influenced her choices. Both participants experienced strong family ties, but their actions led to strained relationships with their children, particularly those who were victimized.

Mesosystem (Interactions Between Microsystems)

The interactions between family, economic conditions, and social relationships contributed to the participants' involvement in OSAEC. Abigail's cousin introduced her to cyber-related activities, which reflects how family influence played a role in normalizing illegal work. Beatrice's neighbors, who were already involved in cyber-exploitation, further reinforced her belief that such activities were an easy way to earn money. These interactions between different microsystems facilitated their entry into online exploitation.

Exosystem (Indirect Influences)

External economic pressures heavily influenced their choices. Both participants grew up in impoverished environments where stable employment was scarce. Abigail struggled with financial instability, limited education, and informal work, which made cyber-exploitation appear as a viable option. Beatrice's financial burdens, including debts and medical expenses for her children, pushed her into illegal online activities. Additionally, technological advancements made internet access widely available, even for those in lower-income groups, facilitating their entry into cyber-exploitation.

Macrosystem (Cultural and Societal Factors)

The societal perception of poverty and crime played a role in shaping Abigail and Beatrice's experiences. Both felt that their crimes were judged harshly compared to other offenses like drug-related crimes or murder. Abigail, in particular, believed that her actions were not as serious as prostitution or physical abuse. The normalization of online exploitation within their communities further illustrates how cultural and economic conditions influenced their decision-making.

Chronosystem (Changes Over Time)

Over time, both Abigail and Beatrice recognized the consequences of their actions. Their incarceration led to separation from their children, emotional distress, and eventual remorse. They expressed a desire for rehabilitation, seeking vocational training and personal growth. However, their initial justifications highlight how economic struggles, and societal influences shaped their perceptions of crime. The legal consequences also changed their perspectives, forcing them to reflect on their actions and consider alternative, lawful ways to earn a living.

Socio-Economic Factors and OSAEC Engagement

The results revealed that economic hardship played a significant role in the decisions of Abigail and Beatrice to engage in OSAEC-related activities. Both participants justified their actions as a means of financial survival, echoing findings from studies such as those by Woord en Daad (2022), which emphasized how poverty-stricken families in the Philippines turn to cyber-related crimes to meet their basic needs. The literature also suggests that poverty, coupled with a lack of stable job opportunities, often forces individuals into exploitative work, including child sexual abuse facilitation (UNICEF, 2019).

The review of related literature supports the notion that economic vulnerability predisposes families to OSAEC, as seen in the cases of Abigail and Beatrice, who lacked consistent employment and resorted to online sexual transactions as an easier means of generating income. This aligns with the Philippine Children's Ministry Network (2021) report, which found that the financial necessity was a key driver of cyber-related crimes, especially among mothers who function as primary caregivers.

Psychological and Emotional Conflicts

The results highlighted the internal moral struggle and psychological burden carried by the facilitators of OSAEC. Abigail and Beatrice exhibited varying levels of guilt and justification regarding their actions, a theme consistent with Whittle et al. (2013), who found that perpetrators often rationalize their involvement in online child sexual exploitation. Abigail's insistence that online activities were less harmful than physical exploitation reflects the "no touch, no harm" mentality identified in studies by ECPAT (2014).

Furthermore, Beatrice's depressive symptoms and struggle with self-forgiveness align with research from UNICEF (2019), which discusses the long-term emotional toll that engagement in OSAEC has on perpetrators, particularly mothers. This highlights the need for psychological interventions to address not only the trauma of the victims but also the rehabilitation of the facilitators.

Family and Social Influences

One of the recurring themes in the results was the role of family in either enabling or discouraging OSAEC. The literature (Hernandez et al., 2018) identifies OSAEC as a family-based crime, with parents or close relatives often acting as facilitators. This is evident in Abigail's case, where her cousin introduced her to the illicit activity, mirroring findings from the International Justice Mission (2020), which reported that more than half of OSAEC cases involved parental or familial participation.

Despite societal stigma, both respondents received support from their immediate families, which contrasts with broader societal condemnation. This is consistent with findings from UCA News (2022), which reported that while the broader community may stigmatize individuals convicted of cyber-related sexual crimes, familial and close social networks often remain supportive.

Legal Awareness and Consequences

Both respondents displayed partial awareness of the legal implications of their actions but struggled to fully comprehend the severity of their crimes. The results showed that they viewed their offenses as lesser crimes compared to physical abuse or murder, a perspective that is echoed in previous studies (IJM, 2019). The review of literature indicates that a significant portion of individuals involved in OSAEC lack proper legal awareness, which is exacerbated by the evolving nature of cyber laws in the Philippines (Republic Act 11930, 2022).

The literature highlights that while strict penalties exist, enforcement remains inconsistent (Moaje, 2022). The legal outcomes for Abigail and Beatrice suggest a need for stronger preventive measures, including community-based education on the repercussions of engaging in OSAEC.

Technological and Environmental Influences

One crucial finding in the study was the role of technology in facilitating OSAEC. The results showed that both participants had easy access to online platforms where transactions occurred. This aligns with the research of Teunissen (2012), which found that the increasing digital presence of children and families creates opportunities for cyber-related abuse. Additionally, the PCMN (2021) study confirmed that children are spending more time online without adequate parental supervision, increasing their vulnerability to exploitation.

Beatrice's case also highlighted how community environments influence engagement in OSAEC, as she was introduced to cyber-based activities through neighbors who were already involved. This reflects studies by ECPAT (2020), which found that social networks within impoverished communities serve as recruitment channels for OSAEC.

Intervention and Rehabilitation Considerations

The findings emphasize the need for structured rehabilitation programs for OSAEC facilitators. Both respondents expressed a desire to reintegrate into society and pursue legal livelihood options post-incarceration. Literature from IJM (2019) and UNICEF (2021) supports the importance of vocational training and economic empowerment in reducing recidivism among OSAEC offenders. Abigail's participation in livelihood training within the correctional facility aligns with recommended strategies for reintegration (ECPAT, 2018). Additionally, the study's results suggest that holistic approaches—combining economic aid, legal education, and psychological support—are necessary to break the cycle of exploitation. This mirrors the systems-based intervention model proposed by UNICEF (2021), which advocates multi-sectoral collaboration in addressing OSAEC at its roots.

Synthesis

The results, when examined against existing literature, reaffirm the multifaceted nature of OSAEC in the Philippines. Economic struggles, psychological conflicts, familial influences, technological accessibility, and legal misunderstandings all contribute to the perpetuation of this crime. The findings highlight the importance of comprehensive prevention strategies, including education, economic support, and rehabilitation programs, to effectively combat OSAEC. Future interventions should focus on systemic changes that address both the victims and the facilitators, ensuring a holistic response to this pressing social issue.

Summary, Conclusion, and Recommendations

Summary

The study's findings highlight the intricate factors surrounding Online Sexual Abuse and Exploitation of Children (OSAEC) through the personal narratives of two individuals, Joan and Jojo, who became facilitators of such crimes. Economic hardship emerged as a primary driver, pushing them into illegal cyber activities as a means of financial survival. Both women justified their actions by prioritizing their families' needs, particularly their children's well-being, despite later expressing guilt and remorse. Their stories reflect the normalization of OSAEC in impoverished communities, where social networks, familial ties, and technological access play a significant role in recruitment and facilitation. The study also revealed a lack of legal awareness among the facilitators, who perceived their crimes as less severe than other offenses like prostitution or murder. Psychological conflicts were evident, with both women struggling to fully accept the long-term impact of their actions on their children. The research underscores the need for a holistic intervention approach, including economic support, legal education, and psychological rehabilitation, to prevent and address OSAEC. Findings suggest that rehabilitation programs focusing on vocational training, family reintegration, and structured psychosocial support could be crucial in breaking the cycle of exploitation and enabling sustainable reintegration into society.

Conclusion

This study provides an in-depth analysis of the complex factors contributing to Online Sexual Abuse and Exploitation of Children (OSAEC) in the Philippines, as illustrated through the cases of Abigail and Beatrice. Based on these, the following are hereby drawn:

1. Both mothers appear unaware of the emotional impact on their children. Instead, they considered their child as a tool to get money. The consequences that they felt did not include an understanding of the consequences for their children.
2. The findings reveal that economic hardship, limited employment opportunities, and financial desperation are significant drivers of OSAEC facilitation. Additionally, the role of family influence, societal perceptions, legal awareness, and technological accessibility further contribute to the prevalence of this crime.
3. The study highlights that OSAEC facilitators often justify their actions as a means of financial survival, downplaying the psychological impact on their victims. Both Joan and Jojo exhibited remorse and sought rehabilitation, recognizing the severity of their actions only after facing legal consequences. Their experiences underscore the need for comprehensive intervention programs that address both the perpetrators and victims of OSAEC.
4. The findings emphasize the importance of a multi-sectoral approach in combating OSAEC. Economic support, legal education, psychological rehabilitation, and vocational training must be integrated into rehabilitation programs to prevent recidivism. Addressing systemic poverty, strengthening family support systems, and enforcing stricter digital regulations are crucial steps in mitigating the risks associated with OSAEC.

5. Overall, this study reinforces the need for a holistic and community-based response to OSAEC. By addressing the root causes and implementing structured rehabilitation efforts, policymakers, social workers, and law enforcement agencies can create a sustainable framework for prevention, intervention, and reintegration, ultimately breaking the cycle of exploitation.

Recommendations

The recommendations below follow other research findings outlined in the paper. There remains one gap in the research and that is a focus on the parent facilitator as the offender. Several theories could be used in future papers that would delve deeper into single factor theories such as distorted cognition and empathy deficits, and multifactorial factors such as Finkelhor's Precondition Model. We therefore recommend that further case studies be used that focus on the parent alone apart from environmental stressors that could appear to rationalize their behavior. Likewise, by focusing on the parent, the onus then falls on understanding the psychological treatment of the individual first while others handle the ecological factors that appear more popular.

Based on the findings of this study using systems theories, the following recommendations are proposed to address the issue of Online Sexual Abuse and Exploitation of Children (OSAEC) in the Philippines.

1. Strengthening Economic Support and Livelihood Programs

Government and non-government organizations (NGOs) should implement sustainable livelihood programs for economically vulnerable families to prevent financial desperation, which often leads to engagement in OSAEC.

Microfinance and skill-building initiatives should be made accessible to low-income individuals, particularly women, to provide them with alternative and legal income sources.

2. Enhancing Legal Awareness and Cybercrime Education

Community-based education campaigns should be conducted to raise awareness about OSAEC, its legal consequences, and the psychological impact on children.

Law enforcement agencies and social workers should work together to educate families on the risks associated with online exploitation and how to protect children from cyber threats.

Stricter penalties and more consistent law enforcement efforts should be implemented to deter individuals from engaging in OSAEC.

3. Implementing Comprehensive Rehabilitation Programs

Structured rehabilitation programs should be developed for OSAEC facilitators, focusing on psychological counseling, legal education, and vocational training to support reintegration into society.

Restorative justice must be a part of all services, with the goal to increase awareness of the impact on the victims of OSAEC, their children.

Programs should include parenting education to help offenders understand the long-term effects of exploitation on children and rebuild their family relationships. The mind set, the personal values and beliefs they hold (i.e., “no touch-no harm”; the “easy-money attitude”) require change process from within through psycho-social processing and therapy)

4. Strengthening Family Support Systems

Family-centered interventions should be designed to provide emotional and financial support to children affected by OSAEC, ensuring they receive proper care and rehabilitation.

Support groups should be created for incarcerated parents to maintain healthy communication with their children and facilitate reintegration upon release.

5. Stricter Regulation of Online Platforms

The government should collaborate with tech companies and international agencies to enhance monitoring and control over digital platforms used for child exploitation.

Stricter cybersecurity policies should be enforced to prevent foreign perpetrators from exploiting vulnerable families through online transactions.

6. Multi-Sectoral Collaboration and Policy Development

A coordinated effort among government agencies, NGOs, law enforcement, social workers, and community leaders is essential to develop a comprehensive anti-OSAEC framework.

Policies should be reviewed and updated regularly to adapt to evolving online threats and ensure that both perpetrators and victims receive appropriate interventions.

REFERENCES

- Acar, K. V. (2016). Sexual extortion of children in cyberspace. *International Journal of Cyber Criminology*, 10(2): 110-126. DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.163398/
- American Psychological Association (APA). (2012). *Consensual qualitative research*. <https://www.apa.org/pubs/books/essentials-consensual-qualitative-research-sample-chapter.pdf>
- Bronfenbrenner, U. (1994). *Ecological models of human development*. In International Encyclopedia of Education. Vol. 3, 2nd Ed. Oxford: Elsevier.
- Brown, A. (2016, June 3). *Safe from harm: Tackling online child sexual abuse in the Philippines*. United Nations' Fund for Children. Retrieved from: https://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/philippines_91214.html
- Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre (2013). *Threat assessment of child sexual exploitation and abuse*. London.
- Craven, S. B. (2006). Sexual grooming of children: Review of literature and theoretical considerations. *Journal of Sexual Aggressions*, 12, 287-299. doi:10.1080/13552600601069414

- CWC. (2016a). The second national plan of action for children (2011-2016) [pdf file]. Retrieved from <https://cwc.gov.ph>
- Davy, D. (2017). Regional Overview: Sexual Exploitation of Children in Southeast Asia [PDF file]. Retrieved from http://www.ecpat.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/Regional-Overview_Southeast-Asia.pdf
- Dela Rosa, et.al. (2019). The Philippines Health System Review [PDF file]. Retrieved from http://www.wpro.who.int/philippines/areas/health_systems/financing/philippines_health_system_review.pdf
- DeMarco, J.N., C. Cheevers, J. Davidson, S. Bogaerts, U. Pace, M. Aiken, C. Vincenzo, A. Schimmenti, & A. Bifulco. (2017). Digital dangers and cyber-victimization: A study of the European adolescent online risky behavior for sexual exploitation. *Clinical Neuropsychiatry*, 14(1): 14-112.
- ECPAT International (2016). *Terminology Guidelines for the protection of children from sexual exploitation and sexual abuse*.
- ECPAT International (2014). *The commercial sexual exploitation of children in South Asia: Developments, progress, challenges and recommended strategies for civil society*. http://www.ecpat.org/wpcontent/uploads/legacy/Regional%20CSEC%20Overview_South%20Asia.pdf
- ECPAT International. (n.d.). *Online child sexual exploitation*. Retrieved from <https://www.ecpat.org/what-we-do/online-child-sexual-exploitation/>
- ECPAT, INTERPOL, and UNICEF. (2022). *Disrupting Harm in the Philippines: Evidence on online child sexual exploitation and abuse*. Global Partnership to End Violence Against Children.
- Europol (2015). *The Internet Organised Crime Threat Assessment (IOCTA) 2015*. Retrieved from: https://www.europol.europa.eu/sites/default/files/publications/europol_iocta_web_2015.pdf
- Hennick, N. & Kaiser, B. N. (2022). Sample sizes for saturation in qualitative research: A systematic review of empirical tests. *Social Science & Medicine* (297). <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.socscimed.2021.114523>
- Hill, C., Williams, E. N., & Thompson, B. J., (1997). A guide to conducting consensual qualitative research. *The Counseling Psychologists*, 4(25), <https://doi.org/10.1177%2F0011000097254001>
- JM, PIACAT, & U.S. Department of State Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons (2019). *Online sexual exploitation in children in the Philippines: Analysis and recommendations for governments, industry, and civil society*. <https://ijmstoragelive.blob.core.windows.net/ijmna/documents/OSAEC-in-the-Philippines-Report.pdf>
- Iagan, J., Suarez, A., & Martin, J. (2021). *Towards reconciliation, healing, and recovery in OSAEC family reintegration*. Brief Policy Report.

- Prevalence, process, and offender characteristics. *Trauma, Violence & Abuse*, 15(2): 126-139. DOI: 10.1177/152483801351154
- Martellozzo, E., & Taylor, H. (2010). Cycle of Abuse. *Index on Censorship*, 38(1), 117-122.
- McAlinden, A. M. (2006). "Setting 'em up": Personal, familial and institutional grooming in the sexual abuse of children [Abstract Only]. *Social and Legal Studies*, 15:339-362. doi:10.1177/0964663906066613
- Mitchell, K. J., D. Finkelhor, & J. Wolak. (2005). The Internet and family and acquaintance sexual abuse. *Child Maltreatment*, 10(1): 49-60.
- Moaje, M. (2022). *Internet now safer for kids with anti-online sexual abuse law*. <https://www.pna.gov.ph/articles/1180657>
- NEDA-UNICEF (2018). *Situation analysis of children in the Philippines*. <https://www.unicef.org/philippines/media/556/file>
- Ospina, M., C. Harstall, & L. Dennett. (2010). *Sexual exploitation of children and youth over the Internet: A rapid review of the scientific literature*. Institute of Health Economics.
- PCMN. (2021). *Community Awareness of Online sexual abuse and exploitation of children (OSAEC) in Iligan City*. A Baseline Survey.
- PCMN, (2022). Data from the safety of children online module worksheets in Dasmariñas City and Iligan City. Data Analysis Report.
- Philippine Health Research Ethics Board (2022). *National ethical guidelines for research involving human participants*. <https://ethics.healthresearch.ph/index.php/phoca-downloads/category/4-neg>
- PSA. (2022). *Children in the Philippines*. <https://psa.gov.ph/statistics/children>
- Quayle, E., L. Loof, & M. Ainsar. (2010). *Methodological Issues. Online behavior related to child sexual abuse*, M. Ainsar & L. Loof (Eds.). Stockholm: ROBERT Project, EU Safer International Programme, www.childcentre.info/robert/Online_behvaieur_related_to_sexual_abuse.pdf
- Swaner, R., M. Labriola, M. Rempel, A. Walker, & J. Spadafore. (2016). *Youth involvement in the sex trade: A national study*. New York. Retrieved from: <https://www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/ojdp/grants/249952.pdf>
- Teunissen, I. (2012). *Child pornography: First report of the Dutch National Rapporteur*. The Hague: Bureau of the National Rapporteur on Trafficking in Human Beings and Sexual Violence against Children.
- UCANews. (2022). The Philippines' secret pandemic of child sexual abuse. <https://www.ucanews.com/news/the-philippines-secret-pandemic-of-child-sexual-abuse/96695>

- US National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (2010). *Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children: Fact Sheet*. http://www.missingkids.com/en_US/documents/CCSE_Fact_Sheet.pdf
- United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (2015). *Study on the effects of new information technologies on the abuse and exploitation of children*. New York.
- United States Agency International Development (USAID). (2018). *Child protection protocol for data collection*. <https://www.norc.org/PDFs/LARA/LARA%20P%20BIE%20Child%20Protection%20Protocol%20Feb2018.pdf>
- Varella, (2017). Live streaming of child sexual abuse: Background, legislative frameworks and the experience of the Philippines. *ECPAT International Journal*, 12, 47-61. <https://humantraffickingsearch.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/Philippines.pdf>
- Ward, T. & S. M. Hudson. (2001). Finkelhor's precondition model of child sexual abuse: A critique. *Psychology, Crime and Law*, 7: 291-307.
- Ward, T. & R. Siegert. (2002). Toward a comprehensive theory of child sexual abuse: A theory knitting perspective. *Psychology, Crime and Law*, 8: 319-351.
- Whittle, H. C., C. Hamilton-Giachritsis, & A. R. Beech. (2013). Victims' voices: The impact of online grooming and sexual abuse. *Universal Journal of Psychology*, 1 (2): 59-71.
- Wolak, J., D. Finkelhor, K. J. Mitchell, & M. L. Ybarra. (2008). Online "predators" and their victims: Myths, realities, and implications for prevention and treatment. *American Psychologist*, 63(2), 111-128. DOI: 10.1037/0003-066X.63.2.1
- Woord en Daad (2022). *Stakeholder mapping of the actors working to combat Online Sexual Abuse and Exploitation of Children (OSAEC) in the Philippines - a face-to-face focus group discussion (FGD)*. Quezon City.
- World Hope International. (2020). *OSAEC: A Modern Face of Human Trafficking*. World Hope International. Retrieved in <https://worldhope.org/OSAEC-a-modern-face-of-human-trafficking/>

Philippine Journal of Child Sexual Abuse
Volume 14/2025
ISSN 2243-9315

COMMENTARY

Kasabwat o co-facilitator?

Redefining parents who produce child sexual abuse materials to use online: Two case studies

Zenaida Rosales and Lois J. Engelbrecht

*Center for the Prevention and Treatment of Child Sexual Abuse
Quezon City, Philippines*

Introduction

As access to technology has increased, so has it increased the opportunities for families to victimize their children by coercing them into being the model for sexual images. Parents became, instead of the guardians against abuse, an active and even willing participant in the abuse. Numerous studies have increased the understanding of OSAEC. Early research was focused on the impact on the victim (Havanaar, G., 2013) More recent studies from IJM, ECPAT, and UNICEF highlighted the environmental variables such as English, easy access to the internet, well established financial transaction, and social cognitive distortions. Most studies pointed to poverty as the main stressor for mothers to abuse their child in this way and that, in fact, the funds gained were only used for daily needs.

Parents who use their child as the image model are commonly referred to as co-facilitators of the abuse. According to the Oxford dictionary, facilitation means to “make (an action or process) easy or easier”: as such, the action is not stated to be positive or negative. A co-facilitator implies merely a member of a group, all sharing responsibility. Yet, there is nothing positive about the intent and process these mothers employed to share images of their children for sexual purposes online. Nor is there anything shared beyond the dyad of mother and child-model. Using the term facilitator allows an interpretation of something positive. Instead, the terms collaborators and conspirators, also work together for a shared purpose, but these terms connote something negative, which is more appropriate to the OSAEC crime. Parental involvement in OSAEC and CSAM is a form of organized abuse, and because it is illegal, the terms collaboration or conspiracy would be more accurate to describe this behavior. Perhaps the best term and one we want to introduce to even better reflect a parent who is part of the organized crime of OSAEC is accomplice, *kasabwat*. The Oxford dictionary defines an accomplice as “a person who helps another commit a crime”. The accomplice is part of the crime and thus better reflects the seriousness of the impact on the victim. This paper will outline why we advocate for the change in terminology presently used to refer to parents who share pictures online for sexual use.

"... addressing the problem of parental production. Indeed, the available evidence suggests that CSAM production is trending toward the more severe abuse of ever younger children, and the most likely producers of such content are parental figures ... It is therefore imperative that embedded assumptions within research and policy that marginalize or overlook parental perpetration are challenged, and that research is carried out into the dynamics and characteristics of parental CSAM production to inform the development of specific and effective prevention, early intervention, prosecution, and victim support responses." (Salter & Wong, 2023, p1834)

This paper outlines offender-focused theories to understand the behavior of the parent as an individual who has control over her own behavior, and not one who is a victim of the environment; even in the most socially strictly constructed systems, individuals do have the power to determine their own behavior. This paper wishes to expand on previous studies to deepen the understanding gleaned from the case studies of two incarcerated mothers from the Masanda (2025) interviews.

Literature Review

This paper reexamines the case studies from the Masanda (2025) report of mothers incarcerated for OSAEC crimes based on three papers that outline theories that focus on the sexual offenders in general, and three papers that focus on female offenders who use CSAM. While none of these studies came from the Philippines, we feel that global research can inform our work to prevent and intervene in the alarmingly large population of CSAM and internet offences in the country.

Dangerfield, B., Ildeniz, G., & O Ciardha, C. (2020) outline single-factor and multifactorial theories of contact sexual offending, with a focus on the male offender. Single-factor theories include deviant sexual interest, distorted cognition, empathy deficit, and intimacy deficits. Other single factors mentioned are theories in emotional regulations, emotional congruence with children, and deviant sexual fantasy. Multifactorial theories are Finkelhor's Precondition Model, Marshall and Barbaree's Integrated Theory, Hall and Hirschman's Quadripartite Model, Ward and Siegert's Pathways Model, ITSO, and Seto's MFM of Sexual Offending. Of note is that these theories are based on predominantly male offenders.

Deviant sexual interest is the factor most often linked to child sexual abuse. Theories to explain this interest in children include social learning theory and early traumatic experiences that shaped fantasy and masturbatory behavior. Recent biological and developmental factors have taken on more interest that are based on genetic and neurodevelopmental research. The next factor most linked to sexual abuse is distorted cognition, how social information is used to shape belief and behavior. These beliefs include not only their behavior but also their victim's behavior. Empathy deficit

is a third important factor linked to sexual abuse, based on the two components of perspective-taking and vicarious emotional responding. Offenders cannot identify the emotions of the child and lack the capacity to replicate those emotions. (Dangerfield, B., Ildeniz, G., & O Ciardha, C., 2020)

Dangerfield, B., Ildeniz, G., & O Ciardha, C. (2020) outline various multifactorial theories. Finkelhor's Precondition Model combines "*four etiological factors: emotional congruence, sexual arousal to children, blockage, and disinhibition* (p.28)." It is perhaps the most common theory social workers use in the work to prevent and intervene in cases of child sexual abuse in the Philippines; understanding the motivation for sex with children, how that motivation allows the minor attracted adult to move forward, following which the individual must get beyond the external protection of children, and finally, the child themselves. Marshall and Barbaree's Integrated Theory, limited to male perpetration by known offenders, placed a deeper emphasis on the development of attachment-related vulnerabilities. "Importantly, *they see the development of vulnerability and resilience as a dynamic process whereby the development of healthy adult relationship can buffer the individual from the consequences of early negative experiences* (p30)." Hall and Hirschman's Quadripartite Model explains primary motivational precursors, highlighting "how multiple causal factors can interact in different ways depending on the primary vulnerability of an individual (p31)". Ward and Siegert's Pathways Model sought to synthesize the various multifactorial theories, bringing together desire (motivational/emotional), belief (perception and memory), and action (action selection and control). The motivation-facilitation model (MFM) of sexual offending presents motivator factors (paraphilias, high sex drive, and intense mating effort) and facilitator factors that cites Finkelhor's Four Precondition Model. Finally, Ward and Beech's Integrative Theory of Sexual Offending (ITSO) places emphasis on personal agency into four domains: biological factors, ecological niche factors, neuropsychological factors, and agency-level factors, stated as "personal and explicit goal setting, and enactment (p32)".

We found three studies that focus on the female internet offender. Salter, et. al. (2021) focusses on the use of child sexual abuse materials (CSAM), offender typologies and impact on their child victims. The paper is based on the understanding most perpetrators are male parental figures, and the victims are predominately female below 9 years. Female offenders accounted for 28% of the total, with 35% perpetrated solely by the biological mother, and 65% perpetrated along with a male partner. The motivation for the offense was not a subject of the study and instead merely stated that "... the mothers produced the materials for the benefit of men online or men they knew (p.9)."

Salter and Wong's (2023) review provides insights especially relevant to examining the parent as co-facilitator of OSAEC. CSAM offenses often involve parents, requiring distinct policies and practices to address familial and nonfamilial exploitation. Parental involvement and certainly the use of the term 'facilitator' to describe parents of OSAEC, suggests that CSAM is a form of organized abuse. The authors state

in their conclusion that “... the problem of CSAM production and distribution will not be resolved without acknowledging and addressing the problem of parental production....It is therefore imperative that embedded assumptions within research and policy that marginalize or overlook parental perpetration are challenged and that research is carried out into the dynamics and characteristics of parental CSAM production to inform the development of specific and effective prevention, early intervention, prosecution, and victim support responses (p1834)”.

The Martelloze, E., Nehring, D., Taylor, H. (2010) study is from the U.K., and while not recent, stated important components of the sexual abuse of children and the internet that continue today. Of importance to note is that the data about female internet sexual abusers does not appear to be much different today, more than 10 years later; that is, while women are involved as offenders, instigators, facilitators, and participants, they remain, according to this research, in a predominant minority.

[O]ur initial findings suggest that, for a range of motivations, women may actively participate in the online abuse of children, they may coerce or coax children into submitting to acts of abuse, and they may play a significant role in facilitating abuse by offender. While women’s involvement in those three roles has been widely documented and rehearsed in the case of real-life children sexual abuse, evidence of women’s involvement in relevant online activities is, as yet, scant. (p.606)

Christensen, L. & Woods, J. (2024) offer some insight into the role that women and mothers play in the CSAM arena, highlighting that this population of offenders is larger than previously thought and had been ignored until recently. Of particular interest to this paper is that, citing research from the International Justice Mission (2020) in the Philippines, at present the global epicenter of online CSAAM, 87% of the cases have at least one female perpetrator. Reasons for this included poverty and weak child protection laws and implementation. While the mother may photograph the child, other facilitators who organize payments are likewise female relatives. By contrast, research from the United States found that female perpetrators made up 2.9% of the sexual exploitation cases, and 12.2% in Australia, with 74.2% of those cases using CSAM (Christensen & Woods, 2024).

Comparing the female producer of CSAM to male perpetrators of the same crime remain uncertain because of possible disparate motivations and influences, including co-offenders, prior victimization, mental health, opportunity, and sexual motivation. Regarding the motivating factor of a co-offender, Christensen, L. & Woods, J. (2024) state that while most women were co-producers of the materials, single offenders collected for their own use. That is, women are not always coerced into this behavior by men, as females can and do choose to engage in sexual offending behavior. “In fact, one professional believes some females intentionally co-offend

with males so their responsibility can be downplayed by suggesting they were under the control of an “abusive” partner (p1486)." Prior victimization and adverse childhood experience of the female perpetrator are contributing factors for women committing CSAM. Likewise, mental health could be contributing factors with CSAAM offending, including a history of substance abuse, suicide attempts, psychotic disorder, and mood or anxiety disorder. Opportunity plays a significant role in the production and dissemination of CSAAM when a motivated offender has an easy target, and there is an absence of guardrails. Finally, while sexual offending appears present in male perpetrators, studies have yet to provide or seek evidence of this for female producers of CSAM (Christensen & Woods, 2024).

Christensen & Woods (2024) stated that “[m]edia often portrayed females distinctly differently in the media from men; *females were depicted with undertones of mitigation, vulnerability, sympathy, and romanticism compared with males who were represented with disgust, or depicted as predatory, evil, or pedophiles (p1490).*” In the two studies that explored media depictions, the female offenders were depicted either as victims of circumstance or doubly deviant who were a threat to society.

Hull et. al. (2024) reviewed current literature on female sexual perpetrators, including using CSAM, who entered the criminal justice system. Of interest is the high number of female adolescents in the system. While this does not determine if there are more offences or if there are only more reporting of these offences, it does alert us to take seriously the role that females play in sexual offending, notably for assaultive CSAM. The population in this study was in Australia; however, there is nothing to suggest that this could not appear also in the Philippines, a country that already tops the world in internet abuse. The authors noted that the exposure to CSAM appears at younger ages, a result being the normalization of CSAM which likewise could normalize self-generated material, to which female adolescents are vulnerable. “*The odds of perpetrating an online assaultive CSAM offense were 20.0 times higher for juvenile females compared to both adult males and adult females, and 7.7 times higher for juvenile females compared to juvenile males (p14).*” Of note, however, is that these females tended to not to be taken as seriously by the legal system and thus tended to have less serious action taken against them. Why this occurs, both that more adolescent females offend than adolescent males and why the legal system appears to be more lenient, needs further study if this trend continues into adulthood, both for the offender and the victim.

Single-Factor Theories of Sexual Offending

The goal of this paper is to review the vulnerabilities and characteristics of the incarcerated mother involved in online sexual abuse and exploitation of their children using cases from Masanda (2025). Existing studies of mothers involved in OSAEC focus mostly on the social environment as stressors on these mothers, using poverty as a possible mitigator for their crime. An additional possible mitigator is referring to these mothers as co-facilitators, muting their responsibility as guardians of their children and giving them excuses for their behavior. By reviewing the case studies with an eye to the causes of sex abuse that places the burden onto the offender, the goal is to better understand the specific vulnerabilities of these mothers to design services that instead build resilience and thus prevention.

This paper is based on just two cases and thus we are not suggesting broad generalities. Instead, this discussion evaluates OSAEC mothers more broadly based on single and multivariate factors used to understand child sexual offenders. We point to the fact that mothers who produce images of their children for sexual purposes online do fit into the factors of sexual offenders and thus would more appropriately be categorized as some form of co-offenders.

Deviant Sexual Interest

Deviant sexual interest is the most often linked to child sexual abuse yet appears to be missing in studies about OSAEC. Mothers, instead, are referred to as facilitators, or co-facilitators. Deviant sexual interest also does not appear to be a factor with the Masanda (2025) case studies. Yet the mothers are aware of the purpose of the CSAM. What is not clear, however, is the exact nature of the way that the pictures of their children are used by the client. One can imagine a variety of scenarios, from mild to grotesque.

Yet the sexual nature of the use of the CSAM is ignored and instead, the responding mothers state firmly that they embarked on OSAEC for money to help their children and family. There is an apparent unspoken assumption that it is the deviant sexual interest of the client that drives the market. As Beatrice stated, *“The foreigner said he would increase the money he would send [based on the picture sent].”* (*Kasi sabi ng foreigner dadagdagan niya yung i-sesend niyang pera*). How the client uses these pictures does not appear to be part of any advocacy, despite the possibly strong message for mothers if they were aware before they began of how the pictures would be used.

Abigail stated her reason for entering OSAEC was, *“Of course... since I'm so tight on money, I'd have to include them [my children]. (Siyempre yung... sa sobrang kagipitan ko sa pera, nasali ko pa sila don.) Her motive likewise included, “So that they don't get caught up in the drug trade ... because our family has a history of drugs. So that they don't end up like that, it's okay for me to get hurt.”* (*Na para hindi sila mapasok dun sa kalakaran na droga. Kasi may history yung pamilya namin na about sa droga. Para hindi sila mapunta sa ganon, yung okay lang na ano ko mapahamak ako.*)

Beatrice needed the money for survival because her husband and children were sickly. *"Ahh, I'm in debt so I need... money, so what am I supposed to do? What I do is for them too."* (*Ahh nabaon kasi ako sa utang kaya, kailangan kong ng pera, kaya na ano ako na gawin yun ... para sa kanila rin yung ginagawa ko.*) *Sometimes I have no choice, especially when my child gets sick. They're often sick... all of them are, really. (Pagka minsan nagigipit, pag may sakit yung anak ko. Kasi sakitin... sakitin kasi sila lahat.)*

While Beatrice needed the money for survival, Abigail had enough for survival but used the money for schooling and nice clothing for her children, and even to share with her relatives. *"And I can even help my siblings who are in trouble."* (*Tas natutulungan ko pa yung mga kapatid ko na nagigipit sila.*)

Ultimately, Abigail perhaps stated the obvious that, *"Well, I didn't think about it carefully, while the money was just there."* (*Yun po, hindi po ako nag-isip ng mabuti, yung pera nandyan lang naman, mas...*)

Masanda (2025) characterized the need for money as justification versus guilt. This argument likewise distances the OSAEC mothers from the sexual nature of the crime. If the sexual nature of the crime is not directly stated, OSAEC mothers are given the opportunity to, in fact, justify their behavior. Yet the mothers knew that the pictures were for sexual purposes; they knowingly sent images of their children to a customer with deviant sexual desires. And thus, sexual behavior, deviant or otherwise, needs to be a part of the assessment. How does the mother perceive the customer's use of the images? Does her own behavior of filming sexual images of her children affect her own sexual behavior? Do these mothers not see or watch sexual photographs or filming of their children? Does the behavior affect their own sexual relationship with their husband or others?

While incarcerated mothers have stated an acknowledgement that their behavior traumatized their children, the nature of the trauma is not specified. Is the traumatic sexualization of sexual abuse a factor to these mothers? Does this filming affect the sexual interaction between mother and child; that is, in the way that they teach sexuality or talk about tangential sexuality issues such as boundaries or intimacy or even gender development? In fact, is traumatic sexualization even considered when using their child's image online?

Sex and sexuality are taboo subjects, or at least extremely sensitive subjects. While society and culture are changing, the country remains mostly a sexually restrictive culture, where sex is valued but tends to be feared because of the problems that can result from sexual activity; sex is likewise dirty and an impolite topic of conversation. When describing these mothers as co-facilitators, they are separated from the dirty sex and instead are only a common abuser. The interviewed mothers appear to have embraced this separation from the sexual aspect of their behavior. They questioned why their behavior is punished as severely as other crimes. Abigail stated that, *"It's like this is the most heinous crime, more than the others... the sentence is so heavy, seems too big for people like us who committed human trafficking. It's like we had killed someone. Our sentence is very high"*. (*malaking, yung, yung sentensya parang masyadong malaki sa mga kagaya namin human trafficking. Parang... para ka*

naring pumatay ng tao. Yung sentensya samin, napaka-taas.) Of note is the removal of the word 'sex' from human trafficking. The mothers appear to have felt misjudged by those around them, supporting the notion of shame for their picture-taking non-touching behavior rather than shame of any personal deviant sexual attraction unknown or considered.

For Abigail, who was already in the sex trade along with a cousin and other extended family members, online sex work was normal. *"They [her children] understand what I am doing." (Alam nila kung ano yung ginagawa ko.) When asked what Abigail thought about what her children thought about sex work, she responded, "Yes, you will be given money, you will earn money. That's it." (Oo nag-ano, mabibigyan kang pera, nag-ma--, mag-e-earn ka ng pera. Ganun.) "Yes, they think that's normal." (Oo, kala nila na normal lang yung ganon.)*

So, when Abigail needed more money, her cousin suggested to *"do it like this. Show your kid"*. *(Tas sabi ng kuya ko, gawin mo ganto. Pakita mo yung anak mo).* It was a smooth progression.

It is possible that there is a numbness around the concept of sex and the sexual pictures. For example, Abigail was preparing her children without at first any indication that the pictures were for sex. When the interviewer asked what the reactions of the children were when they realized that the pictures were sex related, Abigail responded with, *"Nothing...It seems normal to them ... they haven't asked what they're doing... they just know that we're talking to a foreigner"*. *(Oo, parang normal lang sa kanila...pero di pa nila ako naaktuhan kung ano ginagawa-paanong, anong, klaseng trabaho yun. Alam lang nila na yung may kausap kaming foreigner).* Yet Beatrice stated that when her daughter found out that her pictures were secretly taken while taking a bath, which she discovered only upon arrest, she stopped talking with her mother.

Distorted Cognition

Distorted cognition appears to play the largest role for these two mothers and in most, if not all, of the related research on OSAEC. The cognitive distortions came from the belief that OSAEC does no harm because there is no touch, the value of family-togetherness, and even that they are not the ones abusing their child. Together with the evil of poverty, these messages are strong. To compound this, these messages appear to be shared by society, creating a circular construct that allows mothers to project any blame or shame outwards thereby absolving themselves from responsibility for their role in the OSEAC.

In the beginning, Beatrice knew that entering the OSAEC business was wrong and probably would hurt her child. Beatrice stated that she was aware (*"Aware na-man po"*) that what she was doing was against the law. The issue for her was necessity, regardless of whether others approved. Abigail likewise felt *"heavy, heavy"* (*Mabigat. Mabigat.*) when she began taking pictures of her children.

Understanding that venturing into OSAEC was wrong was also evident in that both mothers did not want their husbands to know. Abigail shared that when her husband discovered her work, *“we had a fight about my work I don’t always come home.”* (Hindi, pinag-aawayan namin. Hindi naman ako umuuwi lagi.)

Abigail had already been in the cybersex industry herself, but including her children was something that, like Beatrice/Jordan, she did not tell her husband about. When he did find out, post arrest, *“[H]e scolded me... they were hurtful words.”* (Beatrice: *Ano, yung pong nasa Maynila ako, syempre mo sinumbat, sumbatan niya po ako, mga masasakit po na salita.*)

It was clear that these mothers knew that the child that they claimed to love would be or could be harmed. *Abigail tried to minimize potential harm by telling her 13-year-old child, “I promise it would only be this one time. I really don’t want to do it anymore. (Ano, sa... sabi po, para pong, ano, isa—yung isang bes—, yung isang... isang beses ko nalang gagawin nangako ako ganun po. Ayaw ko...)”*

The fact that the mothers initially knew that they would or could cause harm is apparent also by the process they used to groom, or prepare their children, to pose for pictures that became gradually more sexual. When defining grooming behaviors, we tend to focus only on the person who will use the child for sexual purposes. In the case of OSAEC, the customer does not have to groom the child. This is what the mother does. The mother is the groomer, not the client. Yet the mother does get something from the pictures, money. The process the mothers used to take and post pictures in ways that they felt minimized any potential harm can be characterized as grooming.

Abigail shared that *“[in the beginning] they were just saying “hi”, but the last time, this is when I took a picture of them without clothes I also have a video of them modeling like that, they were modeling. [Ano lang sila, nag-hihi lang, hi, pero nung last, eto nga yung napicture ko sila ng walang damit... Tas nga, video ko na nag momodel lang sila ng ganon, nagmomodel sila.]”*

Beatrice took the picture in secret. “She doesn’t know that I took a picture of her while she is taking a bath.” (Hindi niya alam na pini-picture-an ko siya habang naliligo.)

When asked what the child thought about having their pictures taken, Abigail responded with, *“Nothing...It seems normal to them ... they haven’t asked what they’re doing.. they just know that we’re talking to a foreigner... [and] maybe, because I think it’s okay.”* (Oo, parang normal lang sa kanila...pero di pa nila ako naaktuhan kung ano ginagawa-paanong, anong, klaseng trabaho yun. Alam lang nila na yung may kausap kaming foreigner). This statement does not indicate that the children were not bothered by what was happening; only that they did not speak out against having their pictures taken. Beatrice’s child, whose picture was taken without her permission and who stopped talking with her mother for a time upon discovery, is perhaps a better indication of how children feel about the use of their images for CSAM. A child not speaking out does not mean that they think it is okay.

What CSAM images are needed or how they are used are guided by the customer's needs. The customer is therefore assumed to be the abuser. Everyone involved or responsible in ways to get those images to the customer are referred to as co-facilitators. This shields everyone else from responsibility for sexual abuse, which historically was once referred to as a heinous crime. There are those of us who can remember when incestuous rape was punishable by death. While we do not endorse the death penalty in any way, it does allow us to ask the question how we have changed regarding the impact on the victim, and why are we protecting these mothers from being characterized as sexual abusers? It remains that the mother is the one to enforce the regulations as set by the customer-abuser. The request for a girl of a certain age resulted in Beatrice taking a picture of her daughter without her awareness or permission while she was taking a bath. The betrayal was not by the customer; it was by mother. Beatrice shared how each time her children come to visit her in prison, this daughter would keep separate and just cry.

The ultimate user of the images for sexual purposes was considered as the perpetrator, allowing these mothers a justification for what they did, rather than place them on the same stage as the sexually deviant customer. Yet, to the child, the abuser is the parent. And likewise, while a part of society offers mothers the label as a co-facilitator, another part of society punishes them as direct abusers. The harsh legal sentence of both mothers interviewed is testament to how part of society judges these behaviors. Yet much of the rest of society appears to be feeding these mothers with a lie that they will not hurt their children because poverty is worse, and that the government not removing poverty or stopping the abusers are the real culprits. Mothers eager to feed their children are easy prey. And mothers have avoided full responsibility for sexually abusing their child by embracing these lies.

Poverty is a powerful force. And certainly, the ease of locating facilitating factors such as internet sites is hard to ignore when your child is hungry or ill. It is easy to convince yourself that poverty is far worse than any possible negative impact of putting your children's sexual pictures online. If we have life, we can overcome whatever evils are placed before us. When was it that OSAEC mothers embrace the idea that no touch meant no harm? While these justifications were used post-arrest, it is probable that the mothers used these same messages to allow themselves to do what they did, either at the beginning or once the pictures were taken and sent. There is no data on whether social messages such as 'no touch means no harm' changed their minds or whether they all along believed that such behavior would not hurt their children. Or even if they simply used the message to justify their action regardless of whether they believed it. Many of the excuses the mothers used did, in fact, come from social messaging that the mothers appear to have embraced. The use of the term 'facilitator' thus reinforces these messages, where terms such as offender or accomplice would be more accurate.

Family unity and family duty are also values that were distorted by these mothers, enabling a role reversal between mother and child. Abigail stated that her children *"don't want to see me being ordered around by other people just to make money"*. (Yung ayaw nila akong makitang inuutos-utusan ng ibang tao para lang kumita.)

Both mothers appeared to recognize their responsibility as a mother to support the family financially with her husband. Both mothers embraced this role and went on to use it to justify the road they took to meet this responsibility. What the mothers did was to bring their children into the role of the parent; they have expanded a child's role in a family to go beyond helping a family financially to include taking on major sources of income that are illegal and detrimental to wellbeing. The child is now the co-parent, and as the co-parent the OSAEC mother now financially depends on her child yet remains with power over the child. By itself this is not an example of cognitive distortion. The distortion is that the mother believes and inappropriately acts on the distorted value of family-togetherness. The parent depends on the child's willingness in the production of CSAM, yet the child remains in the mother's parental control.

Abigail stated that *"[my children] just want to help me. That's what we do. Because for example when they need something they don't want to see me crying. They catch me crying. I feel like I will fall down, can't breathe properly. Just to earn money, but they know that I work like that... that's why they did it to help me. If I were their child, I would do everything to help my parents."* (Oo, yung gus-to nila matulungan lang nila ako. Yun yung ano naming. Kasi yung halimbawa yung tulad nung may kailangan sila, yung ayaw kasi nila akong makitang umiiyak. Nahuhuli kasi nila akong umiiyak e. Tas yung di pa ko natutumba, makahinga ng Mabuti? Para lang kumita, pero alam nil ana nagtatrabaho ako ng ganiyan...kaya ginawa nila yon kasi para tulungan ako. Kung ako magiging anak nila, gagawin ko rin yung lahat para tulungan ko yung magulang ko)

The mothers inherently knew that what they were doing was wrong, but they easily grabbed on to the social messages that, so long as they took the pictures in certain ways, it would cause their children no harm. Both mothers were strong in their statements that the money for the images was needed because they love their children. Except for Beatrice who took a picture of one of her daughters without her knowledge, the mothers described the process they used to help the child feel comfortable, or least not uncomfortable. Abigail began slowly; they even joined their mother in the modeling. This, they believe, was not traumatic, even if social workers tell them that it is. *"they will say that my children are afraid of me, they are traumatized. Just by entering our house full of armed men, I am the only one. Do you think the children won't be afraid?"* (sasabihin nila natatakot yung mga anak ko saakin, nagka-trauma. Sa pagpasok lang nila sa bahay namin na puno ng armado, isa lang ako. Sa tingin mo hindi matatakot yung mga bata?). The trauma according to them began only with the arrest and the way the arrest was made by kicking in the door, holding guns, and then removing the children to DSWD.

Both mothers stated that they were told by social workers following arrest that their children were traumatized. What that meant to them at this early stage of their sentence is not clear. To them, the trauma instead appears to have been the rescue, and the trauma continues because the children are now in the hands of DSWD, where they are unhappy and just want to come home. The mothers appear to believe that their behavior did not traumatize their children; instead, it was the system that traumatized them, as if to say, "I love my children, why are you now punishing my children?" In fact, they want us to know that their families and communities still love them, they are the ones helping. The social workers and the system are being judgmental, giving sentences for crimes that are not as traumatic as their sentence indicates. The message that they perhaps believe, or at least want us to consider, is that they are the victim; the victim of poverty, the victim of wanting to give their children something more, the victim of harsh punishment; *kawawa ako*. To cite Abigail, for the sake of my family, for me "*it is okay for me to rot*".

"[I hope that] my children can return to my family. I have a lot of families waiting for them, it's okay even if I'm the one who rots. They should give my children back because they can't give the love of a family. [In DSWD] there is no such thing as [family love], even if they are still complete. Do you know what is happening, like my daughter, who has scratches, bruises? They said they fought. Are they really not hurting the children? They are definitely manipulating the children, they will say that my children are afraid of me, they are traumatized. Just by entering our house full of armed men, I am the only one. Do you think the children won't be afraid? They will instill in the children's minds how bad their mother is, that is what it's like. What I'm saying is true. It's okay to punish me, the DSWD is not a home, it's like a prison. All I want now for my children is for them to return. They don't need to hold them, keep them for so long. Let the DSWD give back my children because we have a family waiting for them who can support their education." (Mabalik yung mga anak ko, sa pamilya ko. Marami akong pamilyang na naghihintay sa mga yon, okay lang na kahit ako yung mabulok. Bigay nila yung anak ko dahil hindi naman nila mabibigay yung pagmamahal ng isang pamilya. Huwag niyo sabihin sakin na, kahit kumpleto sila dun. Alam ba nitin yung nangyayari, tulad ng anak ko, na may gasgas, kurot, pasa, sabihin mo nakipag-away oh, sila na, sigurado ba silang hindi nila inaano yung mga bata, tiyaka yung minamanipula nila yung mga bata, sasabihin nila na natatakot yung mga anak ko sakin, nagka-trauma. Sa pagpasok lang nila sa bahay nanging nap uno ng armado, isa lang ako. Sa tingin mo hindi matatakot yung mga bata? Napapamulat, isasaksak nila sa isip ng mga bata kung gano kasama yung nanay nila, ganon yon. Totoo naman yung sinasabi ko. Okay lang na ako yung parusahan, hindi naman bahay yung DSWD e, parang kulungan din yon e, parang kulungan yon e. Ang gusto ko lang ngayon, mga anak ko, ibalik nila. Hindi nila kailangan i-hold, i-tira nag anon katagal. Dun sa DSWD, ibigay nila dahil may pamilya kaming nag-aantay sa kanila na kaya silang paaralin. Okay lang na ako ang mabulok, kasi kasanayan ko naman yun e.)

Support from their family and community appears to the incarcerated mothers as forgiveness or acceptance of the justification for what they did rather than as examples of neighborhood compassionate action. Blame and guilt are interrelated. The Self versus Community. Where does the distress come from? Does the distress come from the shame for their behavior or the possible shame from the community? Their community, they feel, continues to support them and that is where their perceived forgiveness is rooted. Abigail felt that *"None, my neighbors [judged me], actually that's why I have food here every day, they [neighbors] are the ones who contributed so that my husband could deliver food to me every day. (Wala po, yung mga kapitbahay ko, actually kaya meron po akong pagkain araw-araw dyan, sila po yung nag ambag-ambag para ma hatiran ako ng asawa kong pagkain dyan araw-araw).*

The system, such as the social workers and police, hurt them. They feel judged and shamed by social workers and others in the legal systems. When asked if she felt judged, Abigail responded with, *"I feel like, from people like you." (Feeling ko, sa mga katulad... niyo.)* They appear to have no personal insight or awareness of their role in their children's DSWD placement, or the fact that their behavior resulted in their present lack of empowerment. As Abigail said, *"They are my children. My children want to go home but are not allowed to by DSWD." (Gusto na nilang umuwi, para magkakasama sama kami. Yun yung pinapasabi nila. Kasi pa, kahit nga pagbanggit sa pangalan tulad nung sa DSWD, banggitin nila yung 'mama', hindi nila pinababanggit, pinagagalitan sila.)*

Abigail: *What they [my children] are saying, they are telling me not to cry anymore, they love me so much. Don't think that they are angry, they are not angry at all with me. They say they love me so much. They want to go home, so we can be together. That's what they are telling me. Because even when they mention names, the DSWD, don't let them mention 'mama', they scold them." (Ang sinasabi—pinapasabi nila, na wag na kong umiiyak, sobrang mahal nila ako. Huwag kong isipin na nagagalit sila, hindi sila nagagalit kahit man lang daw sakin. Sobrang mahal na na daw nila ako. Gusto na nilang umuwi, para magkakasama sama kami. Yun yung pinapasabi nila. Kasi pa, kahit nga pagbanggit sa pangalan tulad nung sa DSWD, banggitin nila yung 'mama', hindi nila pinababanggit, pinagagalitan sila.)* Because, there's no such thing [as family love] in DSWD, right? Don't tell me that, even if they are still complete. Do we know what is happening, like my daughter, who has scratches, bruises, bruises, they said they fought, are they really are not hurting the children, they are definitely manipulating the children, they will say that my children are afraid of me, they are traumatized. Just by entering our house full of armed men, I am the only one. Do you think the children won't be afraid? They will instill in the children's minds how bad is their mother, that's what it's like. What I'm saying is true. It's okay to punish me, the DSWD is not a home, it's like a prison. All I want now, my children, is for them to return. They don't need to hold them, keep them for so long. Let the DSWD give back my children because we have a family

waiting for them who can support their education. It's okay for me to rot, because it's my fault. (Dahil, di na—wala naman ganon sa DSWD e. Diba? Huwag niyong sasabihin sakin na, kahit na kumpleto pa sila dun. Alam ba natin yung nangyayari, tulad nung anak ko, na may gasgas, kurot, pasa, sabihin mo nakipag-away oh, sila ba, siguardo ba silang hindi nila ina-ano yung mga bata, tiyaka yung minamanipula nila yung mga bata, sasabihin nila natatakot yung mga anak ko sakin, nagka-trauma. Sa pagpasok lang nila sa bahay namin na puno ng armado, isa lang ako. Sa tingin mo hindi matatakot yung mga bata? Napapamulat, isasaksak nila sa isip ng mga bata kung gano kasama yung nanay nila, ganun yon. Totoo naman yung sinasabi ko. Okay lang na ako yung parusahan, hindi naman bahay yung DSWD e, parang kulungan din yon e. Ang gusto ko lang ngayon, mga anak ko, ibalik nila. Hindi nila kailangan i-hold, i-tira na ganon katagal. Dun sa DSWD, ibigay nila dahil may pamilya kaming nag-aantay sakanila na kaya silang pag-aralin. Okay lang na ako yung mabulok, kasi kasalanan ko naman yun e.)

Distorted cognition gives insight into how the mothers turned to religion to help them cope. Both mothers wanted to or did try to apologize for what they did. They want forgiveness from their children. They promise that they won't do it again. This quest for quick forgiveness lacks the understanding of the concept of forgiveness which is based on real atonement. To these mothers, they have apologized and now the burden is on everyone else to forgive them and have mercy. *"I hope that others who belittle our work ... will understand."* [Maunawaan ng iba, na hindi nila alam bakit anong nangyayari sa ganiyang trabaho, may tulad niyo na makikinig. Na hindi nanghuhusga, kung kaya minamaliit kami.]

To conclude this section on cognitive distortions, it is not clear whether the mother went into OSAEC knowing beforehand of the possible excuses they could use to justify their behavior. The most common conclusions from studies on OSAEC state poverty and easy access to offenders through the internet. These social messages are rampant and strong and could play a role in countering any advocacy to prevent mothers from entering into OSAEC.

Empathy Deficits

Empathy deficits are an important factor in child sexual abuse offenders. "The child wanted it", for example. This applies to these mothers as well. Empathy deficits are a part of the self-grooming process that began with embracing distorted messages.

Abigail asserted that, "My child just wanted to help me." (*Oo, yung gusto nila matulungan lang nila ako*). "They are not angry at all with me" (*Huwag kong isipin na nagagalit sila, hindi sila nagagalit kahit man lang daw sakin*). It was important for mothers to believe that they were not hurting their children because, as they stated

many times, they loved their children and the OSAEC was instead to help them as a part of family duty. Eventually they even believed that it was what the children wanted. Abigail believed that *“they [her children] understand what i am doing.... Because I do that for our daily expenses (Alam nila kung ano yung ginagawa ko. Kasi ginagawa ko naman yan para sa araw-araw naming panggastos, yung kailangan nila). The children know but also want to help. “They don’t want to see me being ordered around by other people just to make money. (Yung ayaw nila akong makitang inuutos-utusan ng ibang tao para lang kumita.)*

The mothers made sure to point out that the children made their own decisions to help her, and that mother gave her children a choice. According to Abigail, *“Before I did anything to them, I first asked them—I kept asking them if they really wanted it? (Naulit yon, pero nung kasi bago ko naman sila anuhin, tinatanong ko muna sila si—na paulit-ulit kong gusto ba nila talaga?) “But, they agree. If they don’t want it, I don’t bother them.” (Kaso, pumapayag naman sila eh. Pag hindi naman nila gusto hindi ko naman sila ina-ano.) “Yes, definitely if I said—I asked them, if they—they answered ‘no’, I won’t repeat and won’t say it again, I didn’t—” (Oo, tiyaka pag sinabi ko—tina—tinanong ko sila, pag sina—sumagot sila ‘hindi’, yon hindi ko na uulitin sasabihin ko, hindi ko naman sila—)*

Distorted cognition and empathy deficits overlap with family roles and responsibilities. For example, both mothers stated their responsibility to earn money, which appears to follow the expectations placed on the parental roles. With a question to tease out empathy, the interviewer asked Abigail if she would comply with what she requested from her daughter if her mother wanted her to pose for sexual pictures. Joan responded, *“Of course, so I can help my parents.” (Siyempre para matulungan ko magulang ko). To Abigail the child shares the same responsibility for financial stability as the adult. What has happened, which is not uncommon in cases of incest where the daughter becomes the family protector by keeping silent, the relationship between mother and daughter has changed; the daughter becomes the protector of the family and of her mother. However, the child is not simply helping the family, they are instead the major wage earners.*

The child is equally keeping the family from severe poverty. As Abigail asserted, *“But my children, they are studying. Our children, they are studying. Everything I earn. That’s our goal, they should be educated, if possible, they are far from what we know is not good. My children, I tell them, ‘sorry, if you got involved in this’. ‘That’s okay, ma, so we don’t go hungry’. (Pero yung mga anak ko, nag-aaral sila. Yung mga anak namin, nag-aaral. Lahat naman ng kinita ko. Ganun yung goal namin e, mapag-aral sila, kung pwede, malayo sila sa alam namin hindi mabuti. Mga anak ko na sinasabi ko naman nga sakanila na, ‘sorry beh, kung nasali pa kayo sa ganito’. ‘Ayus lang yun ma, para hindi tayo magutom’.)*

In the end, Abigail stated that *“I thought everything that was happening was okay. That I didn’t know it was already wrong. That, they were involved in that, that I didn’t think about it anymore, I was so blinded that I didn’t think about it anymore, (Kala ko okay lang yung lahat na nangyayari. Na hindi ko alam na mali na pala. Na, na-involve sila sa ganon, na hindi ko na naisip, nabulagan na ako na hindi ko na naisip.)*

Lack of Societal Insight

Cognitive distortions and empathy deficits both lead to and are because of a lack of insight. Yet the lack of insight does not belong only to the OSAEC mothers. We have placed a separate item because of the possible need to focus on this factor from a social perspective when working to prevent mothers from entering OSAEC.

At the individual level, we found that both OSAEC perpetrators and facilitators rely on strategies for offence minimization that enable and sustain exploitative practices. An offence-supportive belief of perpetrators, for instance, is that the financial payments they make to the facilitators ‘help’ victims by contributing to education expenses or other material needs of those victimised (Justice and Care, 2023).

Masanda's (2025) characterization of justification versus guilt is appropriate because to the mother, the problem is everyone else. They are not wrong. Our social messages have permitted them to easily enter a practice with easy to grasp rationale and eventually excuses for their behavior. Yet our social messages are also conflicted when it comes to the sentences these mothers were given in court. The conflict could allow the mothers to focus more on their sentences rather than their immoral behavior. For example, both mothers appear to lack understanding of the severity of their crime. They compared their sentences to other offenders such as murderers, making it clear that they should not have similar punishments. Beatrice stated that, *“It’s like we had killed someone. Our sentence is very high”. [Parang... para ka naring pumatay ng tao. Yung sentensya samin, napaka-taas.]*. Despite being told that their actions traumatized their children, they refuse to accept the gravity of the trauma.

Likewise, the mothers fail to understand that any trauma to the child post arrest, such as going into DSWD custody, is a direct result of their criminal behavior. The problem is the legal response. She cannot accept that her actions have resulted in the removal from her family and that she has no power over what happens to her family because of what she did. When asked about trauma and her children, Beatrice focused only on the arrest. *“I haven’t seen them since ... they are at the DSWD. That is why I don’t know the impact of what happened”. (Kaya hindi ko po alam yung epekto po yung nangyari... Hindi ko po kasi sila na nakita e, pagkatas po ng... nasa DSWD po kasi sila...)*

The Female Sexual Offender

Presently, the common categorization for mothers who take sexual images of their children for someone else's use is co-facilitator. This category separates the mothers from the abuse, and in fact deflects blame. The blame and shame are ultimately placed on the customer, perceived as mostly men. The mother who takes the picture is a victim of circumstances. There appears a reluctance to accept that women can cause as much damage and abuse their children as harshly as men. As Christensen & Woods (2024) stated, "... females were depicted with undertones of mitigation, vulnerability, sympathy, and romanticism compared with males who were represented with disgust, or depicted as predatory, evil, or pedophiles (p1490)." While it is difficult to compare female facilitators to male facilitators for reasons that include motivations and influences, such as sexual motivation and prior victimization, the resulting harm should not be minimized when the producer of the images is the parent who provides the most emotional support and social modeling.

It is not clear how much the label of co-facilitator is determined by the sex of the producer of the CSAM. Based on the harsh legal sentences Abigail and Beatrice received, perhaps their sex was not a factor. Yet there remain very strong social messages that these mothers are not on-par with the assumed male user of CSAM. And certainly, the mother who loves her children could never consider herself as a co-offender or even a co-conspirator, someone who joins a secret plan to do something unlawful or harmful. Another term to consider is collaborator, which is, according to the Oxford dictionary, "a person who works or cooperates with another on a project or task, such as a coauthor or coproducer. The term can also refer to someone who collaborates in creating or producing something, like a book or a piece of art. In some contexts, it may also imply cooperation with an enemy force, but this is less common. Overall, the primary meaning emphasizes teamwork and joint effort in various endeavors". While collaboration and facilitation are similar, the difference is that collaboration is a common term when referring to an enemy force and thus the opposite of the connotation of facilitation to achieve something positive. Most appropriate, however, would be that these mothers are co-offenders.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This paper highlights the single factors in individual offenders of deviant sexual desires, cognitive distortions, and empathy deficits. Of note is the process the mother undergoes to allow and then justify her behavior. She loves her children and has a hard time dealing with how poverty is impacting them. She discovers the potential for easy money and tentatively enters the arena with non-sexual pictures of her children. Eventually the children are posing naked, the money increases, and the mother believes that her children wish to participate so that they can help their mothers or at least accept their responsibility as part of a family. The crisis of disclosure is the arrest, when the OSAEC mother is confronted with her crime and the impact of her crime. What we understand from this process is that cognitive distortions and empathy deficits remain strong in these mothers due to difficulty of accepting the truth of the harm their behavior caused the children who they wished to help by entering OSAEC. We hope to change the advocacy around OSAEC prevention by labeling and characterizing the behavior as offending. Full stop. OSAEC is not alleviating their poverty. OSAEC is not helping their children in school. OSAEC is not helping their children develop into psychologically and socially healthy adults. Advocacy that highlights the harm of OSAEC on the children has not worked. Perhaps advocacy directed at characterizing the mother as the offender who places her children in direct contact with a sexual offender might work. The two mothers interviewed by Masanda (2025) are child abusers. Not co-facilitators.

Recommendations cited in most research focus on changes to the external factors of sexual abuse. These include stronger laws and policies around the internet and poverty alleviation. Perhaps the rescue operations do not have to be so dramatic and public. Perhaps the children need to be placed differently than DSWD housing. Perhaps allowing the children more frequent and longer visits with their mother would alleviate the sense that they, too, were being punished. What appears missing, however, is the internal factors of the mothers of OSAEC and possibly even their gender.

Discussion of the single factors relevant to the cases of the two mothers interviewed has led us to focus on the internal factors of these mothers within the external factors. The external factors have allowed the mothers to project their blame and shame outwards. We question whether these messages are excuses that increase the vulnerability of mothers to enter OSAEC. Instead, we recommend that messages decrease their vulnerability and increase their resilience by accurately categorizing the behavior that resulted in their incarceration. It is our opinion that advocacy about OSAEC must stop categorizing or labeling the producers of CSAM, whether parents or strangers, as co-facilitators, and instead state them as co-conspirators or collaborators. The term facilitation has a positive connotation. Conspirators and collaborators instead connote something negative. We support the statement that parental involvement and the use of the term facilitator to describe parents of OSAEC as part of organized crime is a beginning, but not strong enough.

Present guardrails appear as legal or political changes around poverty. Guardrails need to be more personal, more direct. Changing the category from co-facilitator to co-offender or co-conspirator is a potential guardrail and needs to be a part of prevention advocacy. The hope is that the potential harsh label would harden a mother's resolve and thus increase her resilience to avoid going into the OSAEC business.

Categorizing OSAEC mothers as offenders or accomplices, *kasabwat sa pang-aabusong sekswal sa kanilang anak*, and stating these in Filipino dialects, could strengthen present prevention advocacy. The two mothers interviewed by Masanda (2025) appear to believe that they are only co-facilitators, the system is the problem, but their neighbors and family understand. This denies that the mothers sought out the facilitators to connect directly with offenders.

Changing the category from co-facilitator to co-offender or accomplice as a part of treatment will also allow the mother to work towards real atonement and thus potential forgiveness of self and from others.

Future research on OSAEC needs to include offender specific variables and characteristics to better understand prevention and treatment efforts. The fact that the Philippines has the largest number of mothers utilizing OSAEC requires immediate and more focused intervention directed at potential co-conspirators in these crimes against their own children.

Many families live in poverty. But most do not resort to CSAM and participation in OSAEC. While strengthening laws and policies are needed, what is equally needed urgently is to strengthen the resilience of our mothers from becoming collaborators in their children's sexual abuse.

References

- Christensen, L. & Woods, J. (2024). The underexplored topic of females who perpetrate child sexual abuse material offenses: What do we know about this offending group? *Sexuality & Culture*: Vol 28:1482-1495
- Dangerfield, B., Ildeniz, G., & O Ciardha, C. (2020). Theories that explain the sexual abuse of children, *The Wiley Handbook of What Works with Sexual Offenders: Contemporary Perspective in Theory, Assessment, Treatment, and Prevention*, 23-37, John Wiley & Sons.
- ECPAT, INTERPOL, and UNICEF. (2022). *Disrupting Harm in the Philippines: Evidence on online child sexual exploitation and abuse*. Global Partnership to End Violence Against Children.

- Havanaar, Guusje. (2013) *An Exploratory Study on the Background and Psychosocial Consequences of Webcam Child Sex Tourism in the Philippines*, Terre des Hommes Netherlands.
- Hull, I., Christensen, S., McKillop, N., & Rayment-McHugh. (2024). Females' engagement in offline and online sexual offending and their interactions with the criminal justice system: A gender and age comparison. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 1-23. Sage Publishers.
- International Justice Mission, (2020). 2020 Year in Review, Washington, D.C.
- Justice and Care. (2023). *Understanding OSAEC Trafficking in the Philippines Analysis and recommendations for better detection, deterrence and prevention*.
- Martelloze, E., Nehring, D., Taylor, H. (2010). Online child sexual abuse by female offenders: An exploratory study, *International Journal of Cyber Criminology*, Vol 4: 592-609.
- Masanda, Argel B. (2025). Understanding OSAEC (Online Sexual Abuse and Exploitation of Children) from the parent facilitator's perspectives: Two case studies, *Philippine Journal of Child Sexual Abuse*, 2025, V14, p1-37
- Salter, M. & Wong, T. (2024). Parental production of child sexual abuse material: A critical review, *Trauma, Violence, & Abuse*, Vol.24(3), 1826-1837.
- Salter, M., Wong, T., Breckenridge, J., Scott, S., Cooper, S., & Peleg, N. (2021). Production and distribution of child sexual abuse material by parental figures, *Trends & Issues in Crime and Criminal Justice*, No. 616 February 2021.

Philippine Journal of Child Sexual Abuse
Volume 14, 2025
ISSN 2243-9315