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Examining the ecosystem of live streamed child sexual abuse

Rick Brown

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Abstract

The live streaming of child sexual abuse has been a significant problem internationally for more than a decade. It typically involves a child coerced to participate in sexual activities that are transmitted live and watched by others remotely, in return for payment.

This research develops a conceptual framework that describes the live streaming of child sexual abuse ecosystem, based on a review of the existing literature. It identifies four key entities whose interactions are necessary for the continued existence of the ecosystem—victim-survivors, facilitators, consumers and the community. Understanding the relationships between these entities can help to identify points of intervention. Service providers—a fifth entity in the ecosystem—supply the technological infrastructure that allows live streamed child sexual abuse to exist and offer the means by which the problem could be addressed.

Executive summary

The live streaming of child sexual abuse has been a significant problem internationally for more than a decade. It typically involves a child who is coerced to participate in sexual activities that are transmitted live through information communication technology and watched by others remotely. Often, those watching will have requested the sexual abuse of the child and may dictate the nature of that abuse, with instructions often given while the abuse occurs. Viewers will usually pay for the sexual abuse to take place.

For the children involved in live streamed child sexual abuse, it can come at significant cost. It can involve direct physical harm to the child inflicted by an adult perpetrator during a session and can also lead to post-traumatic stress, anxiety, feelings of betrayal and other mental health issues for the children concerned.

Aims of this research

While previous literature reviews have provided valuable insights into the nature of live streamed child sexual abuse—including the who, what, why and where of the offending—the current study aimed to generate a conceptual framework that would provide a deeper understanding of the underlying dynamics associated with this form of crime.

The study was developed and implemented in partnership with GCHQ in the United Kingdom to better understand offender characteristics and offending patterns involved in live streaming of child sexual abuse.

Using an ecosystem framework, four key questions are examined in this study:

- What is the profile of live stream child sexual abuse facilitators, consumers and other offending roles (eg performing contact offenders)?
- What is the relationship between these roles—how do they find each other and interact?
- What is the profile of victim-survivors and what is their relationship with the facilitators?
- How do live stream child sexual abuse offenders (facilitators and consumers) interact with online platforms and with financial payment systems?

Methodology

The study is based on a review of the extant literature on the live streaming of child sexual abuse. The parameters for the search conducted for this review were:

- papers containing empirical findings from research, intelligence or analysis of any aspect of live streamed child sexual abuse;
- written in the English language;
- in academic journals, books and reports produced by universities, non-government organisations, government entities and law enforcement agencies; and
- published between 1 January 2015 and 8 December 2025.

The selection process identified 2,020 records that were subject to review of their title and abstract, with 1,902 records rejected for not meeting the search criteria or for being duplicates. The full text of the remaining 117 records was reviewed, yielding 63 documents that met the criteria.

Entities in the ecosystem

An ecosystem is defined here as a group of entities that interact with each other and with their environment. Indeed, the continued existence of the live streamed child sexual abuse ecosystem is dependent on those interactions between entities. In this ecosystem there are four main entities that interact with each other in a variety of ways. These include victim-survivors, facilitators, consumers and the community. Each entity plays an important role in the creation and maintenance of the ecosystem.

Victim-survivors

Victim-survivors in the live streaming ecosystem are children who are subject to sexual abuse that is viewed and directed by consumers. Where their demographic profile is concerned, victim-survivors of live streamed child sexual abuse are most often female. Their age ranges differ widely from study to study, although several studies suggest the average age is 10–11 years. In cases where victim-survivors may show a degree of autonomy in their decision to participate in live streaming, the average age is typically older. Victim-survivors are located in a diverse range of countries and regions, although frequently mentioned countries include the Philippines, Romania, Russia, Thailand and the United States. There is some evidence of live streaming being more common in middle-income countries that have sufficient infrastructure to support live streamed child sexual abuse (fast, reliable internet and readily available financial services) combined with a high enough level of income inequality or a low enough cost of living to make the relatively low price paid by consumers worthwhile for facilitators.

Facilitators

Facilitators are defined here as individuals (usually adults) who offer live streamed child sexual abuse as a service. They engage with consumers, negotiate and receive payment and arrange for the live streamed abuse to occur. Estimates for the Philippines suggest there were almost a quarter of a million facilitators in that country alone in 2022. Facilitators are typically female and aged in their 20s or 30s. In some cases, facilitators themselves can be children.

Consumers

Consumers are individuals who seek to obtain live streamed child sexual abuse, typically by finding and engaging with facilitators, although in some cases by direct contact with victim-survivors. Consumers will typically pay for 'performances' involving children. Although estimates of the size of the consumer population are rare, one estimate suggests that 1.8 percent of surveyed men had engaged in sexually explicit webcam interactions with children. Consumers are predominantly male, typically aged in their 50s and 60s.

Community

Community in respect to the live streaming of child sexual abuse ecosystem refers to the neighbourhood in which the victim-survivors and facilitators live and the other people who live in that area. Community members are those with whom the victim-survivors and facilitators interact on a daily basis and who may become aware of offending occurring in their neighbourhood.

Service providers

In addition to the four key entities described above, service providers represent another entity, operating as third parties in the ecosystem. For the live streaming of child sexual abuse ecosystem to exist, it is necessary for consumers, facilitators and victims to have access to the technological infrastructure that allows communication between entities and financial transactions to be made. This infrastructure is supplied by service providers, who deploy and manage the technology used for both communication and financial transactions.

Understanding relationships between entities

To understand the ecosystem, we must understand the relationships between the four key entities (victim-survivors, consumers, facilitators and the community). Live streaming flourishes as a result of the social relationships that are formed and maintained between these four entities. These can involve:

- **Relationships between consumers and facilitators**—These can be formed by one searching for, and making contact with, the other in either direction. Consumers may seek out facilitators, or facilitators may seek out consumers. This often involves online communication in the first instance but can also involve a consumer travelling to the facilitator's home country. Consumers will typically transfer money to facilitators in advance of a live streamed session and the median price paid was found to be A\$62.
- **Relationships between facilitators and victim-survivors**—Facilitators are often the mothers, aunts or older siblings of the victim-survivors. These family ties highlight one of the complexities of live streamed child sexual abuse cases, with offending occurring in the context of close social bonds. A facilitator may also offer to adopt the child of a more economically-deprived relative, promising a better life for the child. Facilitators can also be other individuals in the community, who may be introduced to a parent who offers their child in exchange for payment. Alternatively, children living on the street may be recruited with the promise of food or toys.
- **Relationships between consumers and victim-survivors**—In some cases, consumers may make direct contact with victim-survivors, rather than being mediated by a facilitator. This is more likely to occur with older teenagers. Such activities may be viewed as a low-risk means of making money for the victim-survivor, who may seek out consumers via social media. The anonymity offered by online encounters can mean young people feel there is little chance of family members finding out they were directly engaging in live streamed child sexual abuse with consumers.
- **Relationships between consumers and community**—There is no evidence in the literature of a relationship between the consumer and the community in which the facilitator and victim-survivor are located. Indeed, the secretive nature of the activity means that, even if local community members are aware of live streamed child sexual abuse occurring in their neighbourhood, they will not know who the consumers are. However, there is, perhaps, an indirect financial relationship between the consumers and the community, given that the facilitators or victim-survivors receiving payment for live streamed child sexual abuse will mostly spend the proceeds in the local community.

- **Relationships between victim-survivors and community**—Members of the community will often be aware of live streamed child sexual abuse occurring in their neighbourhood. However, there is often a culture of silence associated with child sexual abuse in the Philippines, resulting in acceptance in the community combined with an unwillingness to report cases due to a distrust of authorities. This general acceptance will sometimes be to avoid conflict with neighbours, with many placing a high value on smooth interpersonal relationships and being keen not to be seen meddling in the affairs of others. There is also a belief that, as live streamed child sexual abuse occurs online, it does not constitute exploitation as no physical contact is involved.
- **Relationships between facilitators and community**—As with victim-survivors, facilitators also live in the local community. There can be a contagion effect in some Filipino communities in which families become aware of the lucrative nature of live streamed child sexual abuse from others engaged in the activity locally and subsequently choose to participate. This can also be facilitated by community members imparting knowledge of how to engage in live streaming.

Conclusions

This study provides an overview of the available literature on the ecosystem of live streamed child sexual abuse. Three key lessons can be drawn from this analysis. Firstly, live streamed child sexual abuse is an infrastructure-enabled crime. It exists because global technological and financial systems make it easy for strangers to find each other, communicate privately, exchange money instantly, and transmit live video across borders. Strengthening guardianship across these infrastructures is an essential step towards disrupting this activity.

Secondly, the ecosystem is sustained by relationships and not by isolated actors. Live streamed child sexual abuse persists because of durable, socially embedded relationships between consumers, facilitators, victim-survivors and communities. These relationships involve both cooperation and coercion. Community norms, economic incentives and social contagion each play a role in sustaining the ecosystem at the local level. It follows that effective interventions must target these relational dynamics.

Thirdly, crime concentrates where technological capacity and economic vulnerability intersect—live streamed child sexual abuse flourishes in middle-income countries with strong digital infrastructure, high mobile phone penetration, accessible remittance systems, and significant economic inequality. These locations should be the focus of attention.

Introduction

The live streaming of child sexual abuse has been a significant problem for more than a decade (European Cybercrime Centre 2015). Internationally, it is now considered the main form of commercial sexual exploitation of children (Europol 2024). First emerging in the mid-2000s, as voice over internet protocol (VoIP) applications with both audio and visual functionality became readily available, live streaming of child sexual abuse grew in tandem with the available technology (Brown 2022). In the intervening years, the global internet infrastructure has grown rapidly, connecting more people, with increasingly cheaper and faster communication technology. By 2025, 73 percent of the world's population was estimated to be connected to the internet, growing by 74 percent in just 10 years (DataReportal 2025; Statista 2026). While delivering many positive opportunities, it has also led to widespread online sexual exploitation of children, of which the live streaming of child sexual abuse is just one manifestation.

Live streaming of child sexual abuse typically involves a child who is coerced to participate in sexual activities that are transmitted live through information communication technology and watched by others remotely. Often, those watching will have requested the sexual abuse of the child and may dictate the nature of that abuse, often giving instructions while the abuse occurs. Viewers will usually pay for the sexual abuse to take place (ECPAT 2016). Streaming refers to the technology used to transmit the sexual abuse and can be defined as a broadcast of video and sound of an event over the internet (Cambridge Dictionary 2026).

This description of live streamed child sexual abuse is consistent with international definitions. For example, Article 34(c) of the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child* states that children should be protected from exploitative use in pornographic performances or materials, although it is silent on the mode of such performances (whether online or in person), suggesting both are covered. Article 34(b), which protects children against 'prostitution', is also relevant given that live streamed child sexual abuse is often undertaken in exchange for payment. Similarly, Article 21 of the Council of Europe's (2012) *Convention on the Protection of Children Against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse* (known as the Lanzarote Convention) seeks to criminalise a range of relevant behaviours. Although not specific to live streaming, the convention would nonetheless cover this form of abuse. The criminalised behaviours include recruiting a child to participate in pornographic performances, or causing a child to participate in such performance; coercing a child into participating in pornographic performances or profiting from or otherwise exploiting a child for such purposes; and attending pornographic performances involving children.

As noted by Huikuri (2023), this form of online child sexual abuse differs from others by being largely financially motivated and because the offending includes both physical and virtual elements. It can take a variety of forms including a single child viewed by a single perpetrator, a single child viewed by multiple perpetrators, and multiple children viewed by either a single perpetrator or multiple perpetrators. An adult may also be involved in coercing or physically abusing the child (Napier, Teunissen & Boxall 2021a). It has also been found to include a wide range of sexual content including children dancing while naked, children showing their genitals or upper body, children masturbating themselves or another, children using sex toys on themselves or with another, children performing sex acts with other children, children performing sex acts with an adult, and children performing sex acts with animals (Avery 2021). Clearly, this wide range of activities encompasses a continuum of sexually coercive behaviours, the least serious of which would constitute child sexual abuse material (CSAM) production and the most serious constituting rape and bestiality.

While on the matter of terminology, it is important to note that live streaming of child sexual abuse is different to, and narrower than, online sexual exploitation of children (OSEC). OSEC comprises a wider range of behaviours which, in addition to live streaming of child sexual abuse, includes the production and distribution of CSAM, such as videos and photographs which may be created, stored and shared via the internet. In contrast, live streamed child sexual abuse does not need to be stored on a digital device. OSEC also encompasses child sex trafficking, where a child is advertised online as available to be physically or sexually abused by a paying customer (Walsh et al. 2025). In live streamed child sexual abuse, the contact between the child and the paying customer is always virtual. (It can transition to physical abuse, but this would no longer be classed as live streaming.) OSEC also includes grooming and sexual extortion. In both, a child may be coerced or tricked into providing sexual images or meeting in person. In sexual extortion cases, a child may be blackmailed to meet in person, to provide further sexualised imagery or to pay the perpetrator (Dumitriu, Dudu & Nănău 2024; Wolbers et al. 2025). In cases of live streaming, as defined here, there is either a degree of complicity between the child and the perpetrator (as the child is paid in return for engaging in the sexual abuse) or the coercion occurs one step removed from the perpetrator, who pays a facilitator to make sure the child performs as requested. Live streaming of child sexual abuse can therefore be considered a subset of OSEC.

Understanding its prevalence

The rise of live streamed child sexual abuse may be due to it offering something more than is available from other forms of CSAM, which typically comes in the form of stored videos and photographs. Continued viewing of CSAM can lead to desensitisation of the sexual experience, leading to perpetrators seeking more extreme content (Christensen & Woods 2024; Insoll, Ovaska & Vaaranen-Valkonen 2021). Indeed, perpetrators may engage in live streaming to satisfy sexual fantasies by directing the actions of the child in real time (Tanaya & Puteri 2024). Conducted in secret, live streaming, like other forms of CSAM, can allow the perpetrator to live a double life—pursuing their fantasies in their online lives, unbeknown by those with whom they engage in the real world (Christensen & Tsagaris 2020).

It therefore should come as no surprise that as many as 45 percent of CSAM users have reported viewing live streams of child sexual abuse (Insoll, Ovaska & Vaaranen-Valkonen 2021). Indeed, the online nature of the interactions can also let the perpetrator to detach themselves from the situation, allowing them to view the children as less than real (Rimer 2019). This is made easier when the child is from a different cultural background to the perpetrator, which can result in minimisation of the perceived severity of the abuse (Koning 2021).

There may also be a perception among live streaming perpetrators that the risk of detection by law enforcement is low. Live stream sessions have proven difficult to intercept from a technical perspective due to the use of peer-to-peer structures, along with end-to-end encryption making it impossible to determine the content of a session. This is also compounded by the fact that no digital trace of the content of a live stream session remains on the user's device once a session has ended. Even data that may have been cached in a device's memory may be lost when streamed in a browser's private mode (Horsman 2018). As Christensen and Woods (2024) have put it, 'it's like POOF and it's gone'. This means that, if law enforcement were to seize a live streaming perpetrator's device, it would be unlikely to yield any information of evidentiary value—unless the perpetrator had taken steps to record the sessions using screen capture applications (Açar 2017; AUSTRAC 2019).

In addition to the technical challenges, there are also legal hurdles that make live streaming cases difficult to investigate and prosecute by virtue of the international nature of the crimes. For example, electronic service providers delivering live streaming applications are often based in the United States. Açar (2017) has noted that investigations requiring the real-time monitoring of communications (if indeed technically possible) would only be legally possible if the abuse occurred in the United States or one of the parties in the live stream session was a US citizen. However, in practice, live stream sessions of child sexual abuse often involve parties from outside the United States. Yet legislation associated with child protection in general and live streamed child sexual abuse more specifically is under-developed in many low-income countries, making criminal justice interventions difficult (Christensen & Woods 2024). Even when a prosecution proceeds, a case can be frustrated in situations where there is a need to file legal documents in both the country where the abuse occurred and the country where the perpetrator viewing the content lives (Fell & Jasperson 2023).

Despite these challenges, law enforcement agencies regularly collaborate to share intelligence on live streaming perpetrators and to conduct police operations that lead to children being rescued and offenders prosecuted (Tim Tebow Foundation 2024), often working with local government entities and non-government organisations such as the Child Rescue Coalition and International Justice Mission. Previous efforts to address the problem have included sting operations employing a child avatar and AI chatbot to engage and identify potential perpetrators (Terre des Hommes Netherlands 2014; van der Hof et al. 2019), blocking financial transactions suspected of being for the procurement of live streamed child sexual abuse (Byrnes & Sheridan 2024; International Justice Mission & University of Nottingham Rights Lab 2023; Tarroja et al. 2020) and local awareness raising in countries where live streaming victimisation is common (Tarroja et al. 2020). Support for victims of live streamed abuse has also been noted as important in addressing the problem. This includes psychological support, alternative care arrangements outside of the offending family and longer term support to aid reintegration into the community (Roche et al. 2023; Scroger, Draper & McQuillan 2024). Indeed, reintegration into the family is recognised as difficult because family members may have either taken part in the abuse or tolerated its perpetration, thereby failing to protect the child from harm (Drejer et al. 2024).

Understanding the drivers

A number of systematic reviews and scoping studies have examined aspects of live streaming of child sexual abuse, providing important insights into the nature of the problem (Christensen & Tsagaris 2020; Drejer et al. 2024; Roche et al. 2023; University of the Philippines Manila et al. 2016). Many of the insights are addressed later in this report, such as the profile of victim-survivors, facilitators and consumers and the locations in which offending is known to occur. However, there are additional insights in these studies that further our understanding of the drivers of live streamed child sexual abuse.

Poverty is often mentioned as a factor that explains the supply of live streamed child sexual abuse (Christensen & Woods 2024; Roche et al. 2023; Terre des Hommes Netherlands 2013; University of the Philippines Manila et al. 2016). This can be amplified in countries with limited social welfare protections (Roche et al. 2023). In the absence of other opportunities, individuals may engage in live streaming as a way to meet their basic needs, with children forced to participate in the face of desperate family financial situations. It may also be considered a relatively safe and easy way to make more money than might be available from other means (Christensen & Woods 2024; University of the Philippines Manila et al. 2016). This was especially evident during the COVID-19 pandemic, when legitimate work opportunities were significantly restricted, impacting the most economically marginalised in society (Dela Rosa, Lopez & Manapol 2023; Drejer et al. 2024). This was accompanied by a significant rise in demand for live streamed child sexual abuse from those in countries subject to lockdowns and work furloughs, who found they had more time to engage online in such activities, consuming greater quantities of live streamed child sexual abuse (Christensen & Woods 2024; We Protect Global Alliance 2021). Live streaming was also considered a viable option for perpetrators who might otherwise have travelled to other countries to physically abuse children, but for the international travel restrictions imposed during the pandemic (Europol 2021).

Beyond poverty, a range of interrelated factors have been identified to explain the supply of live streamed child sexual abuse. These have included an established sex industry, consumerism, the influence of peers, lack of parental supervision, poor parenting, the inability of parents to support a large family, and family breakdown (Roche et al. 2023; Terre des Hommes Netherlands 2013; University of the Philippines Manila et al. 2016). The ability to speak English has also been suggested as an important factor in promoting live streaming, enabling facilitators to communicate with consumers in a language commonly used in some of the highest demand countries (Roche et al. 2023; University of the Philippines Manila et al. 2016).

Impacts on children

For the children involved in live streamed child sexual abuse, it can come at significant cost. Tanaya and Puteri (2024) have noted that live streaming can involve direct physical harm to the child when inflicted by an adult perpetrator during a session. Victimisation can also lead to post-traumatic stress, anxiety, feelings of betrayal and other mental health issues for the children concerned (Drejer et al. 2024; Tanaya & Puteri 2023). Christensen and Woods (2024) have summarised some of the negative consequences of live streaming, which include impacts on the physical and emotional development of children, and difficulties forming relationships. There can also be a risk of involvement in live streaming subsequently leading to engaging in other forms of sex work. In some cases, children involved in live streaming have later progressed to become facilitators involved in the live streamed abuse of others (Christensen & Woods 2024).

Methods of organisation

In the context of the Philippines, Terre des Hommes Netherlands (2013) has identified three methods of organisation that typify the ways in which live streaming of child sexual abuse is provided. These include:

- Individual operations—These involve children (often adolescents) engaging directly with foreign consumers without the involvement of a facilitator. Often, they will learn about live streaming from peers involved in the activity, or from adults, and then seek to find consumers who will pay them to perform in live streaming sessions. Published prior to the widespread availability of smartphones and cheap mobile data, Terre des Hommes Netherlands (2013) described how children would use internet cafés (often at night) to perform sex shows for consumers. However, it was noted that receiving payment could be problematic without access to a funds transfer account, such as a Western Union account.
- Family-run operations—These typically involve a parent or other close relative encouraging or coercing their child or children to participate in a live streamed performance. This will typically occur in the family home. Other children in the neighbourhood may also be recruited to participate, receiving payment in return (although typically only a small fraction of the price paid by the consumer). Family-run operations are considered to charge higher prices than individual operations.

- **Cybersex dens**—These are more commercially oriented operations which may operate from someone's home or involve a separate premises. The operators will usually be strangers (non-family members) to those working in these operations and will sometimes involve foreign nationals. Children recruited to work in these dens may be paid and be free to come and go. In other cases, they may be tricked into working in the dens and held captive in the facility in return for no payment. For example, they may be recruited from distant locations, paid for their travel to the operation and then held while they pay off the debt associated with their travel costs. The term 'webcam child sex tourism den' was originally used by Terre des Hommes Netherlands (2013) to refer to these operations, but 'cybersex den' has been the term more commonly used since (Drejer et al. 2024; Hernandez et al. 2018; Roche et al. 2023).

These different methods of operation will be revisited in this paper to examine their continued relevance.

Aims of this research

Previous literature reviews have provided valuable insights into the nature of live streamed child sexual abuse, including answers to the who, what, why and where of offending. In the current study, a different approach was taken in which the extant literature was used to generate a conceptual framework intended to provide a deeper understanding of the underlying dynamics associated with this form of crime.

The study was developed and implemented in partnership with GCHQ in the United Kingdom to better understand offender characteristics and offending patterns involved in live streaming of child sexual abuse. In so doing, the research was intended to help identify ways in which international law enforcement activity could more effectively target offenders. The research was intended to replicate a framework for understanding the ecosystem of CSAM offending developed by Brown (2022). This new framework focuses on the live streaming of child sexual abuse ecosystem and seeks to understand the relative roles and relationships of victim-survivors, their facilitators, the consumers, the community and others. The research also aimed to explore how these ecosystem entities operate within an environment conducive to child sexual abuse live stream offending, including the role played by online applications and the financial system in facilitating the offending.

Using the ecosystem framework, this study examines four key questions:

- What is the profile of live stream child sexual abuse facilitators, consumers and other offending roles (eg performing contact offenders)?
- What is the relationship between these roles—how do they find each other and interact?
- What is the profile of victim-survivors and what is their relationship with the facilitators?
- How do live stream child sexual abuse offenders (facilitators and consumers) interact with online platforms and with financial payment systems?

Methodology

The study is based on a review of the extant literature on the live streaming of child sexual abuse. Although this is a narrative review with the intention of exploring the ecosystem in a largely qualitative way, it has attempted to use a systematic approach to selecting the relevant literature. The parameters for the search conducted for this review were:

- papers containing empirical findings from research, intelligence or analysis of any aspect of live streamed child sexual abuse;
- written in the English language;
- in academic journals, books and reports produced by universities, non-government organisations, government entities and law enforcement agencies; and
- published between 1 January 2015 and 8 December 2025.

The search terms used were:

“

“livestream*” OR “live*stream*” OR “live*online” OR “online*live” OR
“live*distan*” OR “live*broadcast” OR “live*exhibition” OR “pay*per*view”
OR “on*demand” OR “sexual*abuse*to*order” OR “live*sex*abuse” OR
“technology*facilitated*sex*traffick*” OR “technology*facilitated*sex
abuse” OR “cybersex” OR “webcam” OR “web*cam” OR “webcast”
OR “web*cast” OR “videocast” OR “video*cast” OR “video*stream” OR
“porn*performanc*” OR “virtual*child*sex*traffick” OR “cyber*sex*traffick”

+

“child*” OR “minor” OR “juvenile” OR “youth” OR “young” OR “underage”
OR “under*age” OR “teen*” OR “adolescen*” OR “boy” OR “girl” OR
“preteen” OR “pre-teen” OR “*pubescen*” OR “infant” OR “baby” OR
“babies” OR “toddler”

The search included the following reference databases and websites:

- EBSCO, including SocINDEX with Full Text, E-Journals, International Security & Counter Terrorism Reference Center, Criminal Justice Abstracts with Full Text, Psychology and Behavioral Sciences Collection, Violence & Abuse Abstracts, eBook Collection (EBSCOhost);
- Proquest; and
- Google Scholar.

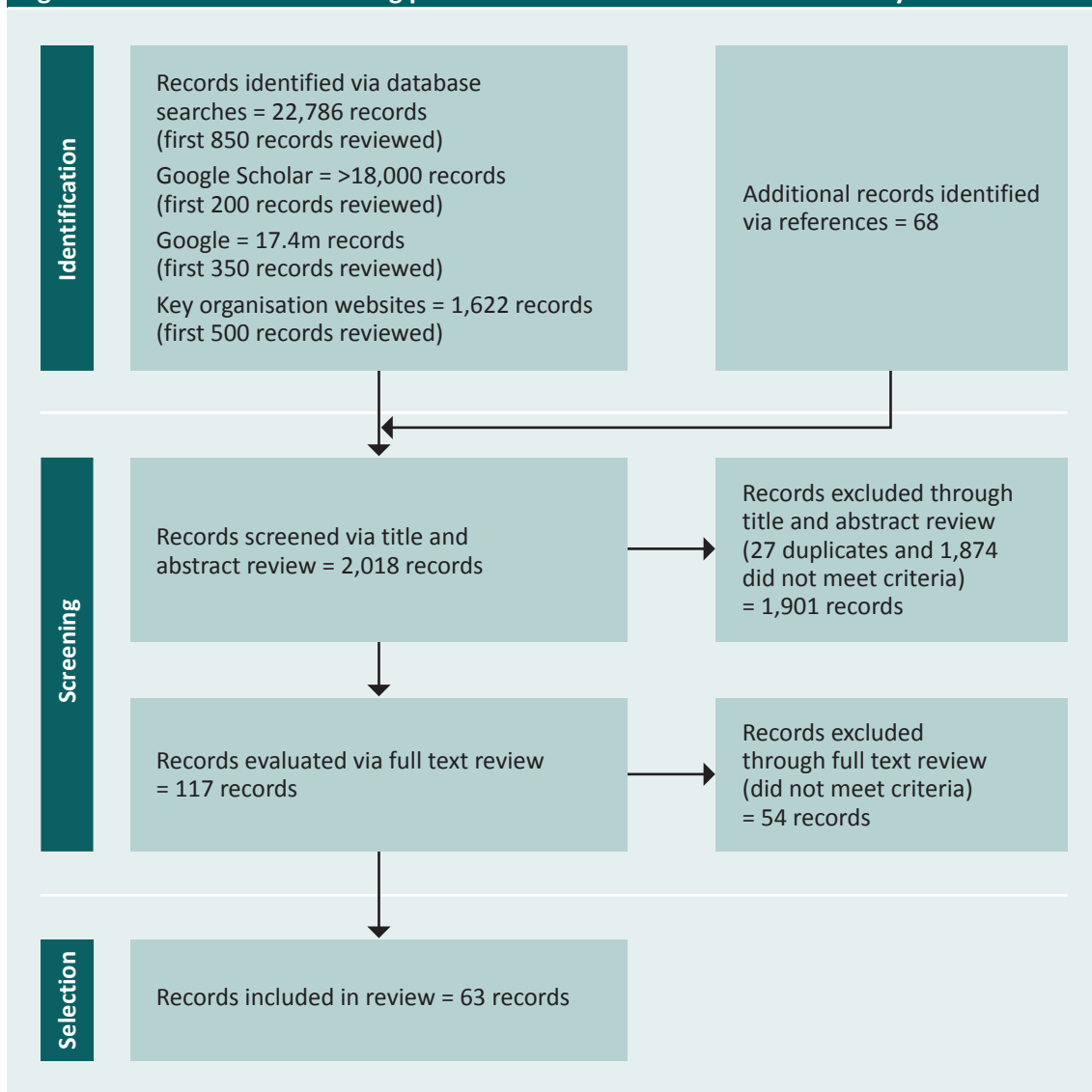
A separate search of Google using wider search parameters was also undertaken to check that important papers not covered by the narrower search terms above were discovered. This used the search terms (*“live streaming” OR livestreaming OR webcam*) *child abuse offenders facilitators*.

The websites of a number of organisations were also searched to identify grey literature that may otherwise have been missed by the search strategy. These included the websites of International Justice Mission, International Centre for Missing and Exploited Children, Childlight, Republic of the Philippines Anti-Money Laundering Council, AUSTRAC, UNICEF, World Childhood Foundation, ECPAT International, We Protect Global Alliance and Internet Watch Foundation.

As illustrated in Figure 1, this selection process identified 2,018 records that were subject to review of their title and abstract, with 1,901 records rejected for not meeting the search criteria or for being duplicates. The full text of the remaining 117 records were reviewed, yielding 63 documents that met the criteria.

Literature that was identified through this process is denoted in the reference list with an asterisk. In addition to the studies selected through this process, there are cases where additional websites or papers are referenced. This includes recent media reporting that provides more contemporary insights into developments associated with live streamed child sexual abuse.

Figure 1: Selection and screening process for literature included in the study



Limitations

There are a number of limitations associated with the methodology used in this study. Some of these relate to the literature inclusion criteria. For example, the date range chosen in this research commenced in 2015 in order to focus on more contemporary developments associated with the live streaming of child sexual abuse. However, this excluded insights from a number of papers that have been highly cited by others (Terre des Hommes Netherlands 2014, 2013). Similarly, the focus on English language studies may have excluded important research written in other languages, such as those relevant to the countries where live streaming is most prevalent.

The search also focused on papers that provided empirical insights. This had a number of implications. It excluded previous literature reviews (such as those noted in the *Introduction*) and papers of a more discursive nature, and this means valuable insights from the authors of these papers may have been lost. However, these papers were scanned to identify empirical studies that may not have been identified through other means. In some cases, it was difficult to discern whether the material was based on empirical findings or on expert opinion. This was particularly the case with some of the grey literature associated with government and law enforcement entities. Reports from these entities were included as they were considered to provide valuable insights that may not have been available from other sources.

There was also a limitation associated with the terminology used in this report. The focus of the current research was on a transactional form of live streamed child sexual abuse in which one party implicitly agreed to supply live streamed child sexual abuse for the consumption of another party. The nature of this transactional relationship will be explored further in this report. However, this excluded forms of live streamed child sexual abuse where the implied agreement between parties was absent. This was relevant for cases where a victim-survivor was directly groomed, tricked or coerced into live streaming sexual content of themselves, which would typically be secretly recorded and stored or shared by a perpetrator. For example, an often-cited study by the Internet Watch Foundation (2018) examined 2,082 images and videos of live streamed child sexual abuse largely involving white Western girls in private settings (eg bedrooms or bathrooms) who had been groomed or deceived into providing sexualised imagery. This offending scenario, often described as ‘capping’ in the literature (Dorotic & Johnsen 2023; Financial Action Task Force 2025), is excluded in the current study.

The terminology used in this study (focusing on ‘live streamed child sexual abuse’) may also have excluded studies where different terminology was used which implied or encompassed this form of offending within a wider definition of perpetration or victimisation. For example, some studies focused on terms such as ‘online sexual exploitation of children’ (Republic of the Philippines Anti-Money Laundering Council 2020b), ‘online child sexual exploitation and abuse’ (Ramiro et al. 2019) and ‘child sexual exploitation material’ (International Justice Mission & University of Nottingham Rights Lab 2023). Where studies focused on these (and similar) terms but specifically mentioned live streaming, they were included in this study. In such cases, the specific terminology used is included in the text of this report when those studies are referenced. However, where these terms were used without mentioning live streaming specifically (but implying its inclusion), the studies were excluded from the current research.

The results presented in this paper draw heavily on studies undertaken in the Philippines. This reflects the Philippines having been a significant hotspot for live streamed child sexual abuse for a number of years, which has drawn international attention from governments and NGOs, increasing investment in programs to address the problem. This in turn has resulted in several research studies being undertaken to explore the characteristics of the problem. While immensely helpful for this study, it does skew the results towards the circumstances in the Philippines and it is acknowledged this may not be representative of the circumstances in other countries where live streaming of child sexual abuse may be prevalent.

By its very nature, the live streaming of child sexual abuse is a covert and secretive activity, with neither facilitators, victim-survivors nor consumers typically being willing to share their involvement in the activity with others. This can make conducting research on this issue difficult, with fieldwork focused on biased samples. This can include fieldwork with convicted facilitators and rescued children, who may not be representative of those yet to be subject to law enforcement attention. Or it may involve interviews with community members or professionals working on the issue, each of whom may have a partial understanding of the problem. Research on consumers of live streamed child sexual abuse is particularly problematic, not only for its paucity but also because it is based on either law enforcement investigation records or on media reports, each of which is limited by the processes and decisions that result in some cases being selected for attention while others are not.

These limitations highlight some of the complexities with the current study and should be considered by the reader when evaluating the findings presented here.

Entities in the ecosystem

An ecosystem is defined here as a group of entities that interact with each other and with their environment (Brown 2022). Indeed, the continued existence of the live streaming of child sexual abuse ecosystem is dependent on those interactions between entities.

In this ecosystem there are four main entities that interact with each other in a variety of ways. These include victim-survivors, facilitators, consumers and the community. The terms ‘consumer’ and ‘facilitator’ are used here to denote different roles of perpetrators, with a consumer being a demand-side perpetrator and a facilitator a supply-side perpetrator. The chosen terms should not be interpreted as diminishing the culpability of these individuals as perpetrators of child sexual abuse.

Each entity plays an important role in the creation and maintenance of the ecosystem. This differs from Brown’s (2022) conception of the CSAM ecosystem, which included consumers, content producers, content distributors, service providers and victim-survivors. While consumers and victim-survivors are conceived in a similar way to those defined by Brown (2022), facilitators in the current study incorporate aspects of both content producers and content distributors, as the process of live streaming involves the simultaneous production and distribution of child sexual abuse. The community as an entity in the live streaming ecosystem is a new addition not included in the original CSAM ecosystem. Here, ‘community’ refers to the geographical location, or neighbourhood, in which the victim-survivors and facilitators are located as it plays a pivotal role in generating and sustaining offending behaviour. While the consumer will also be located in a geographical community and also, potentially, in an online community of likeminded offenders, there is little evidence in the literature of either playing a role in offending. This may highlight an issue requiring further research. Service providers—those that provide the technological infrastructure—are an important fifth entity in the live streaming ecosystem, but are treated as separate from the primary four entities, whose interactions are more direct.

Victim-survivors

Victim-survivors in the live streaming ecosystem are children who are subject to sexual abuse that is viewed and directed by consumers. Unlike with other forms of CSAM (where material can continue to be distributed long after the abuse has ended), the victim-survivor needs both to be present and to participate in the abuse—without them there is no ‘product’ to sell. However, although the live stream transmission may superficially be one-time and ephemeral, it is frequently recorded by the consumer or the facilitator and subsequently distributed online (Drejer, Riegler & Baugerud 2025; Varrella 2017).

Where their demographic profile is concerned, victim-survivors of live streamed child sexual abuse are most often girls (Byrnes & Sheridan 2024), although there are indications of an increasing trend towards boys (Fell & Jaspersen 2023). An analysis of 90 law enforcement operations associated with OSEC involving 381 children conducted in the Philippines between 2011 and 2017 found that 86 percent were female (International Justice Mission 2020). In an analysis of 31 Norwegian criminal cases involving live streamed child sexual abuse, Drejer, Riegler and Baugerud (2025) found that 83 percent of the 574 identified victim-survivors were female. Ramiro et al.’s (2019) study in two Filipino communities also suggested that victim-survivors were more likely to be female, with 63 percent of those interviewed reporting this to be case. Byrnes and Sheridan’s (2024) analysis of case files of live streamed child sexual abuse in the Philippines found that, of the 115 victim-survivors whose gender was recorded, 96 (83%) were female and 19 (17%) were male.

The age ranges of victim-survivors of live streamed child sexual abuse differ widely from study to study, although there is concern that the children involved may be getting younger (Byrnes & Sheridan 2024; Fell & Jaspersen 2023). Drejer, Riegler and Baugerud (2025) found that 55 percent of victim-survivors in their sample of Norwegian cases involving victimisation in the Philippines were aged 11 years or under, while the average age of Filipino victim-survivors in Byrnes and Sheridan’s (2024) case file analysis was 10 years. Similarly, International Justice Mission’s (2020) case file analysis found the average age of OSEC victim-survivors in the Philippines to be 11 years.

In contrast, in cases where victim-survivors may show a degree of autonomy in their decision to participate in live streaming, the average age is typically older. For example, a qualitative study in two communities in the Philippines reported victim-survivors to be aged 12–17 years (Ramiro et al. 2019). In Kenya, girls as young as 15 have been found to participate in live TikTok performances which are then taken on to other private communication platforms for more sexually explicit content (Sivathanan, Clahane & Kemoli 2025). Similarly, in Columbia, girls aged 17 have been recruited to perform in online adult sex shows using the credentials of older performers who are no longer active, or by obtaining fake identities (Bettiza 2025).

Victim-survivors are located in a diverse range of countries and regions. Netclean (2019) identified the most prevalent regions to be Asia, Europe, North America and South America. Specific countries identified in previous studies are shown in Table 1. Frequently mentioned countries included Romania, Russia, Thailand and the United States. However, the Philippines was by far the most frequently mentioned location of victims. The list of countries in Table 1 merely reflects those that have been reported, rather than providing an assessment of scale, although the Philippines has long been regarded as a global hub of live streamed child sexual abuse (International Justice Mission 2020; University of the Philippines Manila et al. 2016) and recent estimates suggest that more than 471,000 Filipino children were trafficked to produce new CSAM in 2022, representing about one percent of all children in the country (International Justice Mission & University of Nottingham Rights Lab 2023).

When examined against the World Bank's (2026) classification of countries by income, 13 of the 30 countries identified in Table 1 were classified as upper-middle-income countries (representing 24% of countries in that category), eight were classified as lower-middle-income countries (representing 16% of countries in that category), eight were classified as high-income countries (representing 9% of countries in that category) and one was categorised as a low-income country (representing 4% of countries in that category). This may suggest a 'Goldilocks effect' in determining the locations of child victims—countries need to be neither too rich nor too poor for live streaming of child sexual abuse to flourish. The relatively high proportion of upper-middle-income countries may represent locations with sufficient infrastructure to support live streamed child sexual abuse (fast, reliable internet and readily available financial services) combined with a high enough level of income inequality or a low enough cost of living to make the relatively low price worthwhile for facilitators.

Table 1: Countries where the supply of live streamed child sexual abuse has been reported

Albania ^a	Malaysia ^c
Australia ^a	Mexico ^{abk}
Brazil ^b	Moldova ^a
Bulgaria ^a	Pakistan ^a
Cambodia ^{abc}	Philippines ^{acdjklnopqrstuvwxy}
China ^d	Romania ^{abcjsAB}
Columbia ^{ace}	Russia ^{abcv}
Dominican Republic ^a	South Africa ^c
Ghana ^a	Sri Lanka ^a
India ^{abc}	Taiwan ^c
Indonesia ^{afg}	Thailand ^{abcdkC}
Jamaica ^a	United Kingdom ^d
Kenya ^{hi}	United States ^{ajvAD}
South Korea ^c	Ukraine ^a
Madagascar ^j	Vietnam ^{ac}

a: AUSTAC (2022); b: International Justice Mission (2020); c: Netclean (2019); d: Napier, Teunissen & Boxall (2021b); e: Bettiza (2025); f: ECPAT, Interpol & UNICEF (2022b); g: Tanaya & Puteri (2024); h: Sivathasan, Clahane & Kemoli (2025); i: Terre des Hommes (2018); j: Drejer, Riegler & Baugerud (2025); k: AUSTAC (2019); l: Albina (2022); m: Brown, Napier & Smith (2020); n: Byrnes & Sheridan (2024); o: Dedase-Escoton et al. (2020); p: Egmont Group (2020); q: ECPAT, Interpol & UNICEF (2022a); r: Europol (2019); s: Europol (2020); t: Hernandez et al. (2018); u: International Justice Mission & University of Nottingham Rights Lab (2023); v: We Protect Global Alliance (2021); w: Tarroja et al. (2020); x: Fell & Jaspersen (2023); y: Scroger et al. (2024); z: World Vision (2020); A: Europol (2018); B: Steliana Culina (2024); C: ECPAT, Interpol & UNICEF (2022c); D: Walsh et al. (2025)

Note: Where multiple papers have been written from the same data, only the first report is cited

Facilitators

Facilitators are defined here as individuals (usually adults) who offer live streamed child sexual abuse as a service. They engage with consumers, negotiate and receive payment and arrange for the live streamed abuse to occur (Byrnes & Sheridan 2024; Financial Action Task Force 2025; Napier, Teunissen & Boxall 2021b). Estimates for the Philippines suggest there were almost a quarter of a million facilitators in that country alone in 2022 (although this estimate combines both live streamed and other forms of OSEC; International Justice Mission & University of Nottingham Rights Lab 2023).

Facilitators are typically female (Financial Action Task Force 2025; Steliana Culina 2024). In both International Justice Mission's (2020) and Byrnes and Sheridan's (2024) analysis of case files involving live streamed child sexual abuse in the Philippines, two-thirds of the facilitators were female.

Male facilitators are less common but have been found to include the partner of a female facilitator (sometimes of foreign origin) and family members such as uncles (Hernandez et al. 2018). Male facilitators often play a secondary role, sometimes engaging in direct abuse of the child when requested by a consumer (Drejer, Riegler & Baugerud 2025), although it should be noted that female facilitators may also be involved in the sexual abuse of the child during a live streamed session (Napier, Teunissen & Boxall 2021a). A case file analysis of 71 OSEC cases in the Philippines by International Justice Mission (2020) found there were an average of two facilitators per case. Thirty-nine cases involved multiple facilitators and in 51 percent of those cases, both male and female facilitators were involved, while in another 36 percent the facilitators were all female (International Justice Mission 2020). This demonstrates the complexity of such cases, especially where there are multiple family members involved.

Male facilitators have also been found to operate cybersex dens in which live streamed child sexual abuse is offered on a more commercial basis. In Pakistan, a man from Germany was reported to have established a cybersex den and trained locals to operate the facility and to recruit children (Ahmed 2025). In Kenya and Columbia, male facilitators have been found to operate adult websites where children perform (Bettiza 2025; Sivathanan, Clahane & Kemoli 2025).

Where age is concerned, facilitators are typically in their 20s and 30s, although the respondents of a household survey in the Philippines reported the average age of OSEC facilitators (facilitators of both live streaming and other forms of CSAM) to be slightly younger, at 19 years. The median age of facilitators in the Philippines was 20 years in Napier, Teunissen and Boxall's (2021a) analysis of chat logs, while the average age of facilitators in Drejer, Riegler and Baugerud's (2025) study of convicted Norwegian consumers was 27 years, as was the median age in International Justice Mission's (2020) case file analysis in the Philippines. In Byrnes and Sheridan's (2024) case file analysis in the Philippines, the facilitators were slightly older, with an average age of 30 years. Hernandez et al. (2018) identified seven facilitators in the Philippines, all of whom were in their 30s. Viewed from the perspective of almost 38,000 suspicious transaction reports of funds received by facilitators in the Philippines in the 18 months to 30 June 2020, 43 percent related to facilitators aged 20–30 years, while 28 percent of reports related to facilitators aged 31–40 years (Republic of the Philippines Anti-Money Laundering Council 2020a).

In some cases, facilitators themselves can be children (as noted later when the relationship between facilitator and consumer is discussed). Napier, Teunissen and Boxall (2021a) reported one case in which a 17-year-old-girl offered her 12-year-old cousin to a consumer for a live streamed session.

Consumers

Consumers are individuals who seek to obtain live streamed child sexual abuse, typically by finding and engaging with facilitators, although in some cases via direct contact with victim-survivors. Consumers will typically pay for 'performances' involving children. Although estimates of the size of the consumer population are rare, a survey of almost 2,000 Australian men by International Justice Mission Australia, Childlight and University of New South Wales (2025) reported that 1.8 percent had engaged in sexually explicit webcam interactions with children.

Consumers are predominantly male (Napier, Teunissen & Boxall 2021; Drejer, Riegler & Baugerud 2025; Hernandez et al. 2018). For example, all of the consumers in International Justice Mission's (2020) analysis of OSEC cases in the Philippines were males. Indeed, female consumers are rare, although there are occasionally cases reported in the media (BBC 2017a; Chaudhari 2024; National Cyber Security 2025). Fortunato et al. (2025) have noted there is no reliable estimate of the proportion of live streaming consumers who are female.

The average age of consumers is typically older than that of other CSAM offenders (Brown & Bricknell 2018), with many found to be aged in their fifties. Examining the profile of more than 2,500 financial transactions for live streamed child sexual abuse, Brown, Napier and Smith (2020) found that the average age of the consumer at the time of the transaction was 54 years, with the youngest and oldest ages being 20 years and 76 years respectively. Similarly, Drejer, Riegler and Baugerud (2025) found the median age at the time of criminal offences to be 52 years (with an age range of 28 to 69 years), while the median age of the seven consumers in Napier, Teunissen and Boxall's (2021b) analysis of chat logs was 58 years (with an age range from 42 to 72 years). A media analysis of cases in the Philippines by Hernandez et al. (2018) identified five consumers, aged between 43 and 74 years. There is also some evidence to suggest that, as well as those aged 55–64 years being more likely to live stream child sexual abuse, so too may men aged 25–34 years (although the authors note caution due to small sample sizes; International Justice Mission Australia et al. 2025).

The most detailed analysis of consumer nationality has come from suspicious transaction reports made by the financial sector to the authorities in the Philippines (Republic of the Philippines Anti-Money Laundering Council 2023). Between the second half of 2020 and the end of 2022, 129,312 suspicious transaction reports relating to foreign remittances for OSEC in the Philippines were received. The United States was by far the most frequently cited country for OSEC-related transactions (67,571 reports), followed by the United Kingdom (10,387 reports), Australia (9,149 reports), Canada (6,880 reports) and Saudi Arabia (6,715 reports). Indeed, the United States, United Kingdom, Australia and Canada have consistently been in the top five countries for OSEC-related suspicious transaction reports since 2015 (Republic of the Philippines Anti-Money Laundering Council 2023). The high rates of reports from these countries likely reflect both a high demand from consumers and greater awareness and surveillance by financial institutions in those countries. These findings accord with a survey of law enforcement personnel (Netclean 2019), which found the most commonly mentioned consumer countries to be the United States (21.1%), Western European nations (15.5%), and Australia and New Zealand (5.6%). However, this survey also found Asia to be heavily represented (16.1%), as well as Russia (5.6%), while Canada was seldom mentioned (0.6%). Research in the Philippines has also identified consumers from Australia, France, Germany, Ireland, Israel, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, the United Kingdom and the United States (Byrnes & Sheridan 2024; International Justice Mission 2020; Tarroja et al. 2020), while Ramiro et al. (2019) described consumers as foreigners of Caucasian appearance, but also those who appeared to be of Japanese, South Korean, Indian and Arab descent. Tanaya and Puteri's (2024) study of cases in Indonesia highlighted the high number of local consumers, while also identifying those from Mexico, Costa Rica and Yemen.

Community

Community in respect to the live streaming of child sexual abuse ecosystem refers to the neighbourhood in which the victim-survivors and facilitators live and the other people who live in that area. Community members are those with whom the victim-survivors and facilitators may interact on a daily basis and who may become aware of offending occurring in their neighbourhood.

Service providers

For a live streaming of child sexual abuse ecosystem to exist, consumers, facilitators and victims must have access to the technological infrastructure that allows communication between entities and for financial transactions to be made. This infrastructure is supplied by service providers, who deploy and manage both the technology used for communication and the technology used for financial transactions.

Providers of technology used for communication

The technology used by the main entities in the ecosystem relies on the global infrastructure of servers, wires, mobile phone towers and satellites that make the internet operate effectively (Brown 2022), and both consumers and facilitators require access to equipment that will provide access to the internet. This will typically be a mobile phone or a laptop, both of which are becoming increasingly affordable. Indeed, Dedase-Escoton et al. (2020) have argued that the affordability and accessibility of this technology has been one of the driving factors behind the increase in live streamed child sexual abuse in the Philippines, noting that families will sometimes prioritise access to mobile phones over other household essentials. Dedase-Escoton et al. (2020) have noted there are sometimes more mobile phones than there are people in a household. Indeed, the Philippines was estimated to have had a rate of mobile phone ownership of 144 phones per 100 head of population in 2024 (compared with 118, 108 and 105 phones per 100 people in the United Kingdom, United States and Australia respectively; World Population Review 2026). Some of the other countries frequently mentioned in the context of live streamed child sexual abuse noted in Table 1 also have high rates of mobile phone ownership. For example, Thailand has a rate of 176 per 100 head of population, while Russia and Romania have rates of 169 and 122 mobile phones per 100 head of population respectively. The United States is somewhat of an anomaly with a rate of 108 mobile phones per 100 head of population, although this still indicates there are more phones than people in the country (World Population Review 2026).

Where individuals cannot afford the necessary hardware, there can be other options. One option is to ask consumers to pay for the equipment. Napier, Teunissen and Boxall (2021b) describe a case in which a facilitator asked a consumer for 3,000 Philippine pesos (A\$81) to purchase a new computer. The consumer requested a specific sexual act to be performed on the child in return.

Another option is to use an internet café. In the Philippines, 'pisonet' outlets offer access to the internet on computers in shop-like premises, with a peso dropped into a slot in the machine providing internet access for a specified period of time, usually about five minutes (Hernandez et al. 2018; Varrella 2017). Young people often use such facilities and their first experience of pornography sites may come from using a computer whose previous user had accessed such a site and not logged out properly at the end of their session (Ramiro et al. 2019; Tarroja et al. 2020). It may be difficult to perform live streamed child sexual abuse from a pisonet because of the public nature of the environment, and shop managers may attempt to police the activity on their premises (Ramiro et al. 2019; Tarroja et al. 2020). However, these premises may also have private rooms that allow activities such as live streamed child sexual abuse to occur without being detected (Dedase-Escoton et al. 2020). Terre des Hommes (2018) report a case in Kenya where a private room in an internet café was used to create live streamed child sexual abuse of boys performing sexual acts to a remote audience.

Availability of data

As well as access to hardware, facilitators need to purchase data to use the internet. Dedase-Escoton et al. (2020) have noted that cheap mobile phone SIM cards with data are readily available in the Philippines. These are not usually registered to the user, allowing communication with a degree of anonymity. The median prices of a gigabyte of mobile phone data in countries like the Philippines, Romania, Russia and Thailand have been calculated to be well below the median price internationally (Cable.co.uk 2023). However, using a different methodology and taking into account average wages in each country, an analysis of the proportion of income spent on a 10-gigabyte monthly phone plan suggested the Philippines was one of the most expensive countries to purchase data (Broadband Genie 2024). Thailand was also above average (ranked 98th out of 179 countries), while Russia, Romania and the United States were in the lowest (most affordable) quartile, ranked 26th, 27th and 35th respectively out of 179 countries (Broadband Genie 2024). This anomalous result for the Philippines is likely to be due to the low prevalence of monthly mobile phone contracts in that country, where such plans tend to be used by professionals and business people. Indeed, 97 percent of mobile phone plans are estimated to be prepaid (pay-as-you-go) and just three percent are regular contracts (Serafica & Oren 2022).

Availability of software

Access to the internet means access to a wide range of applications and platforms that enable communication between individuals in different parts of the world. These applications can be designed for a wide range of purposes, including gaming, gambling, sharing interests, sharing videos and photos, sharing news, buying and selling, and dating to name just a few. Many of these applications allow communication (one-to-one, or one-to-many) between individual users. While largely used for legitimate purposes, the same applications can be used for illegitimate purposes, including live streamed child sexual abuse.

Activity associated with live streamed child sexual abuse typically occurs on the open-net, and darknet use appears to be rare. For example, all of the cases examined in International Justice Mission's (2020) study of law enforcement case files in the Philippines involved activity on the open-net only.

Open-net use is usually accompanied with minimal use of anonymising technologies, such as virtual private networks (VPNs). For example, International Justice Mission (2020) found that, out of 59 law enforcement cases examined, a VPN was proven to be used by just one facilitator, although in a further 21 cases law enforcement did not know whether anonymising techniques had been used. However, it should be noted that some commonly used technologies such as Facebook Messenger, WhatsApp and Telegram provide end-to-end encryption by default, thereby providing a modicum of security. From the consumer perspective, there is evidence to suggest they are slightly more likely than those who do not engage in live streamed child sexual abuse to deploy security measures, including using a Tor browser (7% vs 5%) and a VPN (30% vs 25%; International Justice Mission Australia et al. 2025).

The technology facilitators and consumers use to communicate may differ for the initial contact, the negotiation, and the live streaming of sexual abuse. The initial contact may be made via dating sites (AUSTRAC 2022; Byrnes & Sheridan 2024; Drejer, Riegler & Baugerud 2025; Napier, Teunissen & Boxall 2021a; Tarroja et al. 2020), or via social media sites such as Facebook (Napier, Teunissen & Boxall 2021a; Steliana Culina 2024; Tarroja et al. 2020). Further relationship building and negotiation over the price of live streaming will often occur on encrypted messaging applications that are not subject to moderation (AUSTRAC 2022; Drejer, Riegler & Baugerud 2025). Messaging applications noted in the literature include Facebook Messenger (Drejer, Riegler & Baugerud 2025; Napier, Teunissen & Boxall 2021b; Tarroja et al. 2020), Signal (International Justice Mission Australia et al. 2025), Skype (Napier, Teunissen & Boxall 2021b; Tanaya & Puteri 2024), Telegram (International Justice Mission Australia et al. 2025; Tanaya & Puteri 2024), Viber (Drejer, Riegler & Baugerud 2025; Napier, Teunissen & Boxall 2021b), Yahoo! Messenger (Drejer, Riegler & Baugerud 2025; Napier, Teunissen & Boxall 2021b; Tarroja et al. 2020) and WhatsApp (Drejer, Riegler & Baugerud 2025; International Justice Mission Australia et al. 2025; Tanaya & Puteri 2024). Indeed, consumers have been found in general to use Telegram (43% vs 10%), WhatsApp (42% vs 25%), Signal (15% vs 8%) and Element (6% vs 2%) more often than individuals who do not engage in live streamed child sexual abuse (although this does not necessarily mean consumers were using those applications to engage in such abuse; International Justice Mission Australia et al. 2025). Emails are also reported to be used for general communication, including placing orders and tracking payments (Tarroja et al. 2020).

The applications used change over time as new ones are introduced and others are decommissioned. For example, at the time of writing, Yahoo! Messenger and Skype were no longer available. Skype was by far the most commonly mentioned application for live streaming of child sexual abuse (Drejer, Riegler & Baugerud 2025; Financial Action Task Force 2025; Napier, Teunissen & Boxall 2021b; Tanaya & Puteri 2024; Tarroja et al. 2020). However, since its decommissioning, it is unclear what application has become the platform of choice. Line, a social media platform popular in Asia (particularly in Japan, Taiwan, Thailand and Indonesia) has also been used to live stream child sexual abuse, as has WhatsApp (Tanaya & Puteri 2024).

There are also cases of websites designed for adult live streamed sexual activity being used for live streamed child sexual abuse. For example, Chaturbate, whose users receive payments via tokens, has been identified as a source of live streamed child sexual abuse in Indonesia (ECPAT, Interpol & UNICEF 2022a), as has YouNow, a live streaming service that allows broadcasters to make money by selling virtual goods to viewers, with revenue split between YouNow and the broadcaster (ECPAT, Interpol & UNICEF 2022a). In 2018, a similar site, LiveMe, deleted 600,000 accounts of children under the age of 13 years after it was reported that children were using the site to perform sexually explicit acts in exchange for tokens from viewers (Fox 11 Los Angeles 2018). The platform subsequently increased its minimum age from 13 to 18 years and improved its moderation of live streams (Levine 2022). Similarly, Cybora is described as a chatroom with menus describing different sexual acts that users can purchase, with tokens being used to pay those performing (Dela Rosa, Lopez & Manapol 2023). These token-based streaming sites, as well as others that allow users to pay by the minute for private video chat sessions, have been identified as sources of live streamed child sexual abuse. Keller (2024) identified more than 80 applications advertising children that were available for download from Apple and Google stores.

Tarroja et al. (2020: 65) have noted that facilitators do not typically consider themselves to be 'technology-savvy' and tend to learn as they go. This perhaps highlights that the technology used is simple and readily available, rather than that requiring technical knowledge. This may also explain the low level of online security employed by facilitators, as noted by International Justice Mission (2020).

A technology climate conducive to live streamed child sexual abuse

At the macro level, there is a technology climate that supports the proliferation of live streamed child sexual abuse. This can be seen in the periodic reporting on basic online safety expectations produced by the eSafety Commissioner (2025). Based on mandatory reports provided by electronic service providers to the eSafety Commissioner, significant gaps were identified in the ability of platforms to detect live streamed child sexual abuse. None of the platforms covered by the report were using monitoring tools on all of their systems. There were no detection tools for live streamed child sexual abuse being used on Apple's FaceTime, Discord's Go Live or Video Calls, Google's Google Meet, Meta's Facebook Messenger or WhatsApp, Microsoft's Xbox Party Chats or Teams, or Snap's Snapchat Video Chats. This suggests that consumers and facilitators are able to operate without the potential for technology platforms to identify live streamed child sexual abuse, report it to authorities, or block problematic users.

Providers of technology used for financial transactions

Electronic payments by consumers to facilitators are made through a variety of methods, and these methods will evolve as the financial technology sector develops. This can be as simple as a bank transfer from the consumer's account to the facilitator's (AUSTRAC 2022), although Pačmag (2025) has suggested this is a somewhat outdated payment method.

One of the most common means of making payments is through remittance services provided by money service bureaus such as Azimo, M Lhuillier, MoneyGram, Remitly, Western Union and WorldRemit, which allow funds to be received through a business (often a convenience store) acting as an agent for the money service bureau (Drejer, Riegler & Baugerud 2025; Tarroja et al. 2020). Fund recipients typically provide proof of identity and a serial number provided by the payer to receive payment (Roche et al. 2023; University of the Philippines Manila et al. 2016). These businesses typically have a significant presence in lower income countries, where a high proportion of the population do not have traditional bank accounts. For example, such services are popular in the Philippines, where around 30 percent of the population do not have a bank account, although this has improved markedly in recent years as new financial services have become available (Santosdiaz 2024).

Peer-to-peer payment systems and e-wallets, such as PayPal or GCash, have also been found to be popular ways to pay for live streaming of child sexual abuse (Drejer, Riegler & Baugerud 2025; Financial Action Task Force 2025; Tarroja et al. 2020). These systems allow payments to be made using an email address or mobile phone number without requiring bank account details to be provided to the payer and, indeed, without requiring a bank account to be held at all. The funds can be used to make purchases from businesses that accept such payment platforms (which are becoming increasingly common), although a bank account may be needed to withdraw cash. These newer payment platforms reduce the ability of regulatory bodies to monitor transactions and provide an additional degree of anonymity to the users.

Debit and credit card payments have also been identified in some cases (AUSTRAC 2022; Byrnes & Sheridan 2024). However, they are less commonly used than they once were, partly because of the increased monitoring by large credit card companies (Celiksoy et al. 2023). The use of prepaid debit cards, which are virtually untraceable from a law enforcement perspective, has also been identified (Koning & Rijkssen-Van Dijke 2017). Card payments can be made through traditional money service bureaus, as well as through online applications (such as Maya) that enable the recipient to receive cash that has been sent to them by presenting identifying information to a local agent (Celiksoy & Schwarz 2023).

Virtual currencies have also been identified as an increasingly popular means of paying for online CSAM (Nouwen 2017). These have typically taken the form of decentralised cryptocurrencies (such as Bitcoin) that operate outside of the traditional banking system and that can be openly traded, used to make online purchases and exchanged for fiat currency through an online cryptocurrency exchange. While sometimes mentioned as a means of paying for live streamed child sexual abuse, there is little evidence that this practice is widespread. For example, Drejer, Riegler and Baugerud (2025) report that none of their Norwegian cases involved consumers using cryptocurrencies to transfer funds to facilitators in the Philippines.

Email has also been leveraged as a means of payment offered by many financial institutions. Consumers can register their email address to send payments, allowing the recipient to request that money be deposited in a nominated account. This approach provides a degree of anonymity for facilitators as they are not required to disclose their account details to a consumer (Celiksoy et al. 2023).

As noted earlier, some live streaming platforms use in-app tokens as a means of payment. Tokens are purchased in the app by viewers, who make payments to performers, who can then convert the tokens into fiat currency (minus a commission to the platform). This is a form of virtual currency that only exists within the platform and cannot be traded outside of the platform or used to make purchases elsewhere (Nouwen 2017). Indeed, Drejer, Riegler and Baugerud (2025) noted cases of in-app streaming tokens being used by their sample of Norwegian consumers.

There is some evidence to suggest that consumers may use multiple methods of payment. In the Philippines, Byrnes and Sheridan (2024) found most consumers used more than one payment method to send money to facilitators, with some using as many as four methods of payment. They also noted that facilitators often received funds from multiple payment platforms, suggesting the choice of payment method is more likely to be determined by the consumer than by the facilitator (Byrnes & Sheridan 2024). Drejer, Riegler and Baugerud's (2025) study of Norwegian consumers found that, among those making multiple payments to facilitators, about half used two or three different payment methods.

Summing up the role of service providers

This section has outlined the range of roles played by service providers. From a technology perspective, we must account for:

- hardware manufacturers who produce the laptops and mobile phones used by consumers and facilitators. The inclusion of cameras, microphones and speakers, which have long been standard on such products, are pre-requisites for live streaming;
- telecommunications companies that provide the infrastructure which allows for the fast, reliable transmission of large quantities of data at affordable prices;
- electronic service providers that operate the applications through which communication between consumers and facilitators can occur. This includes not only the applications used for live streaming (the ones for general use and those tailored to performances) but also those used for making first contact (adult sites, dating sites etc), and for negotiating price and content of a live streaming session (encrypted messaging applications etc); and
- financial service companies including banks, credit card companies, money service bureaus and those offering electronic payment platforms, who provide a means of transferring value between countries.

Each plays a role in maintaining the ecosystem of live streamed child sexual abuse. Importantly, they can also play a pivotal role in increasing the effort and risk involved in offending and in reducing the rewards from participating in the ecosystem.

Other entities

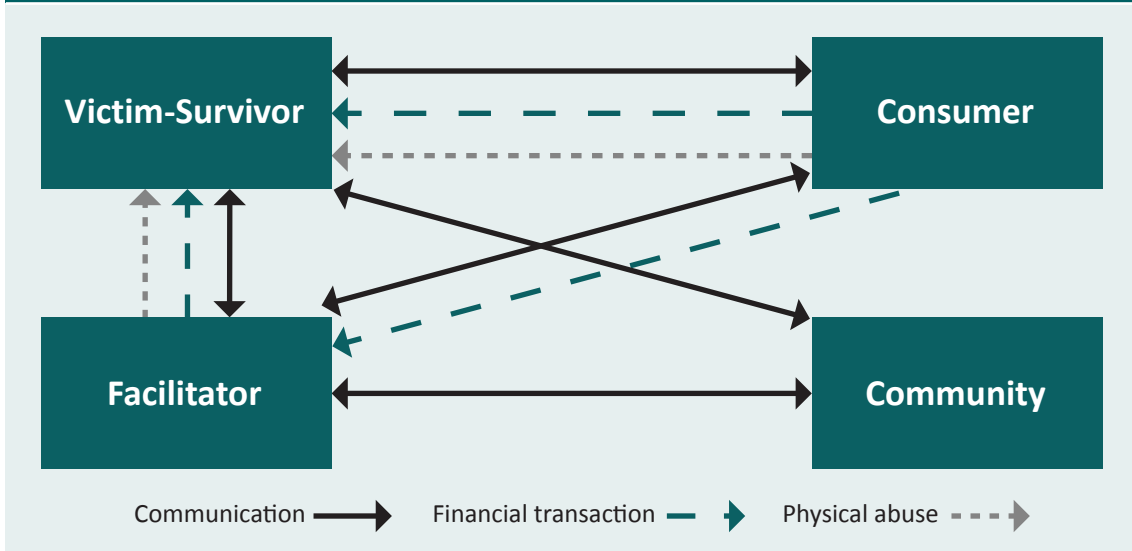
As Brown (2022) has noted, there are also other entities that exist in the ecosystem. These can introduce additional risks to entities engaged in live streamed child sexual abuse. For example, law enforcement agencies may seek to identify, prosecute and convict offenders involved in the activity and non-government organisations may seek to assist law enforcement in their operations and support children when they are rescued. For the purposes of understanding the ecosystem, each of these entities plays a peripheral or ancillary role, rather than being central to its operation.

Understanding relationships between entities

To understand the ecosystem, we must understand the relationships between the four key entities (victim-survivors, consumers, facilitators and the community). Figure 2 draws inspiration from the Square of Crime developed by Young (1994). Young's original conceptualisation of the Square of Crime viewed crime as having four key components—a victim, an offender, the police and the public. Crime could be understood through the interplay of the social relationships between these four entities. In Figure 2, the four entities have been reconceptualised in the live streaming of child sexual abuse version of the Square of Crime as the victim-survivor, two types of offender (the consumer and the facilitator) and the community. Indeed, live streaming flourishes as a result of the social relationships that are formed and maintained between these four entities.

Young (1994) also noted that crime typically involves cooperation and/or coercion. As we shall see, the ecosystem described in Figure 2 includes both. Cooperation between the consumer and facilitator (and sometimes the victim-survivor) is present during the negotiation over price and service provision. It may also be present between facilitator and victim-survivor in circumstances where the victim-survivor is paid to perform. But coercion will also play a role in the relationship between the facilitator and victim-survivor when the latter is forced to engage in a live streamed session—whether by threats of violence or by calls to family loyalty. Here it is important to reiterate that, even where there may be a degree of cooperation between the victim-survivor and the facilitator or consumer, this does not mitigate the fact that the activity is contrary to international treaties (eg *UN Convention on the Rights of the Child* and the Lanzarote Convention) and illegal in many countries where either the victim-survivor or consumer resides.

Figure 2: Relationships between key entities in the ecosystem



From a crime prevention perspective, it follows that live streaming of child sexual abuse could be addressed by placing pressure on or reducing the efficacy of one or more of the relationships that exist between the entities. Here it is argued that these relationships could be diminished by either reducing the freedom with which communication can occur between entities, or restricting the ability for financial transactions to be completed between entities.

Relationship between consumer and facilitator

The relationship between consumers and facilitators can take several forms. They can be formed by either one searching for and making contact with the other—consumers may seek out facilitators, or facilitators may seek out consumers (Napier, Teunissen & Boxall 2021a). This will often involve online communication in the first instance (Napier, Teunissen & Boxall 2021b). This communication is illustrated with a solid line in Figure 2. A variant of this process involves a consumer seeking out a woman providing online adult sexual services and then offering to pay more for access to children (Napier, Teunissen & Boxall 2021a; Steliana Culina 2024; Tarroja et al. 2020). Alternatively, the consumer starts by communicating online with a teenager who directly provides live streamed sessions involving themselves (described further under *Relationship between consumer and victim-survivor* below), and then progresses to asking the teenager to provide access to other children (often a family member) for payment, thereby turning the child victim-survivor into a facilitator (Dela Rosa, Lopez & Manapol 2023; Napier, Teunissen & Boxall 2021a).

There are also cases where the consumer first made contact with a facilitator while travelling to the facilitator's home country (Napier, Teunissen & Boxall 2021a). In such cases, consumers may target single women with children, forming a romantic relationship with the facilitator which continues through online communication when they return home (Drejer, Riegler & Baugerud 2025; Tarroja et al. 2020). In International Justice Mission's (2020) analysis of cases in the Philippines, 39 percent of cases were known to involve consumers who at some point in their lives had travelled to the Philippines. ECPAT, Interpol and UNICEF (2022b) describe a case in which a consumer travelled to and lived in the Philippines for four years, paying to sexually abuse a local woman's children, before returning to his home country and continuing to abuse the children via live streaming for a further six years. Tarroja et al. (2020) have reported instances where foreigners have relocated to the Philippines and established live streaming of child sexual abuse hubs with the support of locals.

The relationship between the consumer and the facilitator may be short-lived, lasting no longer than it takes to negotiate and procure live streamed child sexual abuse. This can turn into repeated communication and transactions for further live streaming sessions provided by the same facilitator, which may involve the same or different children (Napier, Teunissen & Boxall 2021b). In other cases, the relationship between consumer and facilitator can be long term, with regular and ongoing communication. This can result in consumers sending money on a regular basis for items such as school fees, bills, food and clothes (Napier, Teunissen & Boxall 2021b; Tarroja et al. 2020). It is worth noting that descriptions like these are also often given as the reason for payments in the details of international transfers for live streamed child sexual abuse. For example, AUSTRAC (2019) identified the use of terms such as 'accommodation', 'education', 'school', 'uniform' and 'medical bills' to disguise payments for live streaming.

The dashed line in Figure 2 illustrates financial transactions being made by consumers to facilitators, which is a defining feature of live streamed child sexual abuse—especially when the consumer is in a wealthier country and the facilitator is in a poorer one (International Justice Mission 2020). There are, however, exceptions to this general pattern where live streamed child sexual abuse has occurred without payment. For example, there are cases reported in the media where both parties have been in the United States or United Kingdom, or where the facilitator was in the United States and the consumer was in the United Kingdom (BBC 2017b; Office of Public Affairs 2018; Thompson 2022). In these cases, the focus appears to have been a mutual interest in child sexual abuse rather than financial gain. This is not necessarily confined to higher income countries. Tanaya and Puteri (2024) reported two cases in which live streamed child sexual abuse occurred without payment in Indonesia. In one case, facilitators (a father and uncle) sexually abused a child while live streaming to groups on applications such as Skype, Telegram and WhatsApp. In the second case, the facilitator was the victim-survivor's babysitter, who was coerced to sexually abuse the child via live stream by the facilitator's husband, who was the viewer.

Where consumers have sent money to facilitators, the sums have been relatively small. However, these small amounts can represent the equivalent of wages that would take days or weeks to earn in the facilitator's home country (International Justice Mission 2020). Table 2 provides a summary of the amounts identified in previous studies. These were converted into Australian dollars and increased to take account of inflation using the consumer price index, given that the studies were undertaken at different times over the past decade. There remains a degree of error in this process, given that studies will often have included data from earlier years. However, it was not always possible to identify the distribution of years the prices related to; hence the decision to use the publication date as a proxy for the age of the data. In some studies, a typical range of prices was reported and the midpoint in the range was taken to estimate the average across studies. Overall, the prices paid for live streamed child sexual abuse ranged from A\$9 to A\$108. The median price paid across studies was A\$62. The mean was slightly lower, at A\$57, due to the lowest price in the range (A\$9) being an outlier. Once this outlier was removed, the mean value paid (A\$64) was only slightly higher than the median.

Table 2: Amounts paid for live streamed child sexual abuse

Study	Amount paid	Currency	Equivalent in A\$ (December 2025)
Psychosocial Support and Children's Rights Resource Center (2016)	1,000–3,000 ^a	Philippine pesos	\$36 – \$108
Brown, Napier and Smith (2020)	78 ^b	Australian dollars	\$96
Republic of the Philippines Anti-Money Laundering Council (2020b)	1,001–3,000 ^c	Philippine pesos	\$36 – \$108
Napier, Teunissen and Boxall (2021b)	51 ^b	Australian dollars	\$61
AUSTRAC (2022)	13–50 ^a	Australian dollars	\$14 – \$55
International Justice Mission & University of Nottingham Rights Lab (2023)	200–1,500 ^a	Philippine pesos	\$1 – \$100
Tanaya & Puteri (2024)	150,000 ^d	Indonesian rupiah	\$9
Drejer, Riegler & Baugerud (2025)	40.99 ^b	US dollars	\$62
Median paid			\$62

a: Typical range

b: Median value

c: Median value calculated from proportional breakdown of payments made to facilitators

d: Promoted price per session

Analysis of chat logs suggests there is typically a period of negotiation between the consumer and facilitator before a price is agreed (Byrnes & Sheridan 2024; Napier, Teunissen & Boxall 2021a). Negotiations will typically be based on the age of the child, the number of children involved, the extremity of the abuse requested, the length of the live streamed session and the price to be paid (Christensen & Woods 2024; Napier, Teunissen & Boxall 2021a). Byrnes and Sheridan (2024) suggest that, although a facilitator may start with a price, they seldom hold firm on that price and are typically negotiated down to a lower value.

There is evidence to suggest that a small number of prolific consumers account for a disproportionate number of transactions. Brown, Napier and Smith's (2020) analysis of payments sent by Australian consumers to facilitators in the Philippines found that 50 percent of transactions were made by just three percent of consumers. Further analysis of prolific consumers who made 21 or more transactions showed that, compared with those who made fewer transactions, they not only made a much higher average number of transactions (53 vs 3) but also spent more per transaction (A\$75 vs A\$45) and transacted more regularly (an average of every 7 days vs every 15 days; Cubitt, Napier & Brown 2021). Overall, evidence suggests that, as consumers make more transactions to facilitators, the time between transactions shortens and the amount they pay per transaction increases, which may indicate escalation in frequency and severity (Brown, Napier & Smith 2020).

Payment will typically be made in advance of the live stream (Dorotic & Johnsen 2023). However, this creates the risk of a facilitator receiving payment but failing to deliver the live stream. In Brown, Napier and Smith's (2020) analysis of financial transactions for live streaming, 48 percent of consumers were found to make only one payment, leading the authors to speculate that some were scammed into sending money without receiving a service in return.

Tanaya and Puteri (2024) reported two cases in which a monthly subscription model was employed. In both cases, consumers paid 100,000–300,000 Indonesian rupiah (A\$6–A\$18) per month to access regular live streamed child sexual abuse sessions. In other cases, bulk payment may be made in advance for multiple sessions (Drejer, Riegler & Baugerud 2025).

Relationship between facilitator and victim-survivor

The solid line between the facilitator and victim-survivor in Figure 2 represents the relationship between them, with communication flowing in both directions. Facilitators are often the mothers, aunts or older siblings of the victim-survivors (Byrnes & Sheridan 2024; Steliana Culina 2024; Tarroja et al. 2020). For example, a study of 48 victim-survivors in the Philippines by Scroger, Draper and McQuillan (2024) found the facilitator was most commonly an immediate family member (40%), followed by a community member (29%), or an extended family member (15%). In their case file analysis of OSEC cases in the Philippines, International Justice Mission (2020) found that in 41 percent of cases a biological parent was the facilitator, while other relatives facilitated the abuse in a further 42 percent of cases. These family ties between the facilitator and the victim-survivor highlight one of the complexities of live streamed child sexual abuse cases, with offending occurring in the context of close social bonds. Indeed, in the context of the Philippines, Byrnes and Sheridan (2024) have noted the importance of perceived trust between the victim-survivor and facilitator, which will be strongest where familial ties are involved. This sense of trust can mean that the victim-survivor may be unaware they are being exploited by their family and instead view the live streamed child sexual abuse as acceptable and harmless because this is what they have been led to believe (Dedase-Escoton et al. 2020).

Facilitators may also be involved in live streaming themselves in adult sex performances and later co-opt the children into performing in front of the camera, driven by demand and the willingness of consumers to pay more to view children (Steliana Culina 2024; Terre des Hommes 2018). There is also some evidence to suggest an inter-generational aspect to live streamed child sexual abuse, with some facilitators previously having been victim-survivors themselves when they were younger. Interviews with female facilitators by Byrnes and Sheridan (2024) found that 20 percent reported having engaged in online sex work as children. There are now reported to be cases where a grandmother, mother and child have all been victim-survivors of live streamed child sexual abuse (Dedase-Escoton et al. 2020). However, International Justice Mission's (2020) case file analysis in the Philippines suggests cases in which a facilitator has previously been a victim-survivor are relatively rare. Just five percent (six cases) of the facilitators in their sample of law enforcement cases identified them as previous victim-survivors, although researchers note this may be a data recording issue and point to the need for further research on this issue.

A facilitator may also offer to adopt a child of a more economically-deprived relative, with the promise of a better life for the child. Such offers are often accepted, with the relative unaware their child will become a victim-survivor of live streamed child sexual abuse (Tarroja et al. 2020). This abuse can be easier to conceal when the relative lives some distance away, making it less likely the parent will discover their child has been recruited to engage in this activity.

In the Philippines there is a cultural expectation that children have a sense of responsibility and obligation to their parents and will do as they are requested to support the family financially (Dedase-Escoton et al. 2020; Tarroja et al. 2020). This can make it easier to persuade children to engage in live streamed child sexual abuse.

Facilitators can also be other individuals in the community, who may be introduced to a parent who offers their child in exchange for payment. Indeed, there are cases in the Philippines where the facilitator role may be split between a parent and another non-familial person in the community. In these cases, a parent may be offered payment for providing their child to a community member for use in live streamed child sexual abuse. Tarroja et al. (2020) report a case in which a parent was paid between 500 pesos and 5,000 pesos (A\$12–A\$125) for each occasion of live streamed abuse involving their child. In some cases, parents may then become facilitators in their own right when they realise the revenue that can be generated directly (Tarroja et al. 2020).

In other cases, a victim-survivor may be recruited without the knowledge of their parent (Ramiro et al. 2019; Tarroja et al. 2020). This could result from the parent having entrusted their child to a friend, neighbour or relative who then engages them in live streamed child sexual abuse without the parent's knowledge (Dedase-Escoton et al. 2020). In these cases, an uninvolved parent may become aware that their child is involved in this activity elsewhere but will not raise concerns because the child brings money into the family (Dedase-Escoton et al. 2020; Dela Rosa, Lopez & Manapol 2023; Ramiro et al. 2019; Tarroja et al. 2020).

Alternatively, children living on the street may be recruited with the promise of food or toys (Tarroja et al. 2020). There are also cases where a child is hired as a domestic helper, with the offer of payment and accommodation, and is subsequently introduced to live streaming (Tarroja et al. 2020). A child victim-survivor will sometimes recruit more children for the facilitator, with the offer of cash or payment of school fees (Tarroja et al. 2020). Indeed, Ramiro et al. (2019) found peer influence to be an important motivator for some young people commencing live streaming activities.

There are also cases in which the facilitator operates a commercial studio providing adult sexual content via live streaming. Young people under 18 years have been found to work in such settings in Columbia (Bettiza 2025).

The dashed line between facilitator and victim-survivor shows that victim-survivors are sometimes paid (which will be more likely where a non-family member is involved). Tarroja et al. (2020) reported that victim-survivors could be paid 1,000 Philippine pesos (A\$25) per hour, although in some cases they would be paid with lollies or toys. Brown (2016) reports a case in the Philippines where hungry children knew they could visit a particular house in the local community to be fed and receive 150 Philippines pesos (A\$4) in return for participating in a live streamed session. In Indonesia, Tanaya and Puteri (2024) reported a case in which victim-survivors were paid 50,000 Indonesian rupiah (A\$4) per session—while consumers were charged 150,000 Indonesian rupiah (A\$12) per session (noting that multiple consumers could join the same session). Ramiro et al. (2019) found that young people in the Philippines reported being able to make more money from live streamed child sexual abuse than from other jobs available to them in their local area.

The dotted line between the facilitator and the victim-survivor represents the physical sexual abuse that occurs during the live stream. As previously noted, this abuse can range from nudity to being raped by an adult. The facilitator will play a role in controlling the victim-survivor and controlling the context of the live stream to ensure the service the consumer paid for is delivered.

Relationship between consumer and victim-survivor

The solid line between the consumer and the victim-survivor in Figure 2 denotes the fact that consumers may also make direct contact with victim-survivors, rather than contact being mediated by a facilitator (Byrnes & Sheridan 2024; Tanaya & Puteri 2024). This is more likely to occur with older teenagers (Dela Rosa, Lopez & Manapol 2023). Live streaming may be viewed as a low risk means of making money for the victim-survivor, who may seek out consumers via social media. As young people start to engage online with consumers, they will be introduced to new platforms for meeting, chatting and live streaming, with lower levels of moderation than more mainstream platforms such as Facebook (Dela Rosa, Lopez & Manapol 2023).

The anonymity offered by online encounters can mean young people feel there is little chance of family members finding out they were directly engaging in live streamed child sexual abuse with consumers (Ramiro et al. 2019). However, Dela Rosa, Lopez and Manapol (2023) have noted a trend towards young people seeking approval from their parents as live streamed child sexual abuse becomes normalised in some communities. Parents may become complicit by collecting money in situations where it is paid via money service bureaus, which may require proof of adult age (Dela Rosa, Lopez & Manapol 2023; International Justice Mission 2020).

The dashed line between victim-survivors and consumers in Figure 2 denotes payments being sent by the latter to the former. In the Philippines, the money young people earn in this way can provide a degree of independence, allowing them to purchase non-essential items (clothes and gadgets) they had also seen their peers obtain by engaging in live streaming (Dela Rosa, Lopez & Manapol 2023; Ramiro et al. 2019).

As with cases organised by facilitators, cases where a victim-survivor engages directly with a consumer can also result in the consumer travelling to meet the young person in their home country. This can result in physical sexual abuse between the consumer and victim-survivor, as denoted by the dotted line between the two in Figure 2. In the context of the Philippines, Ramiro et al. (2019) have described hitting the ‘jackpot’ of securing a foreigner as a partner and the resulting financial security that can bring, which can to the young person justify their engagement in live streamed child sexual abuse. Similarly, Cruz and Sajo (2015) describe a case in the Philippines in which men were sought online as sponsors, willing to pay for living expenses, in the hope that this might turn into an offer of marriage.

Relationship between consumer and community

Figure 2 shows there is no relationship between the consumer and the community in which the facilitator and victim-survivor are located. Indeed, the secretive nature of the activity means that, even if local community members are aware of live streamed child sexual abuse occurring in their neighbourhood, they will not know who the consumers are. However, there is perhaps an indirect financial relationship between the consumers and the community, given that the facilitators or victim-survivors receiving payment for live streamed child sexual abuse will mostly spend the proceeds in the local community.

Relationship between victim-survivor and community

Victim-survivors are members of the local community and the opportunity for communication between these entities is denoted by a solid line in Figure 2. Members of the community will often be aware of live streamed child sexual abuse occurring in their neighbourhood. For example, a survey in the Philippines found that 28 percent of respondents were aware of OSEC occurring in their community (World Vision 2020).

However, there is often a culture of silence associated with child sexual abuse in the Philippines, resulting in community acceptance, and an unwillingness to report cases due to a distrust of authorities (Byrnes & Sheridan 2024). This general acceptance will sometimes be to avoid conflict with neighbours and to avoid being seen to meddle in the affairs of others, with many placing a high value on smooth interpersonal relationships (International Justice Mission & University of Nottingham Rights Lab 2023; Ramiro et al. 2019). There is also a belief that, as live streamed child sexual abuse occurs online, it does not constitute exploitation as no physical contact is involved (Brown 2016; Byrnes & Sheridan 2024; Republic of the Philippines Anti-Money Laundering Council 2020a). This belief, called a ‘no touch, no harm’ mindset, further normalises live streamed child sexual abuse as an acceptable behaviour in the local community (Dedase-Escoton et al. 2020). These community norms can make it difficult for children to seek help (Republic of the Philippines Anti-Money Laundering Council 2020b).

There may also be a degree of informal social control in the community. Even if not reported to the authorities, families involved in live streamed child sexual abuse may be subject to gossip, harassment and bullying by community members (Ramiro et al. 2019). Indeed, disclosure of child sexual abuse can significantly stigmatise victim-survivors in their local community, which can act as another deterrent to formal reporting (Byrnes & Sheridan 2024). However, communities can also play a positive role in raising awareness about the problem of live streamed child sexual abuse and by identifying households to the authorities that may be at higher risk of engaging in live streaming (Tarroja et al. 2020).

Relationship between facilitator and community

Like victim-survivors, facilitators live in the local community and the solid line between entities in Figure 2 denotes communication between them. Byrnes and Sheridan (2024) have described a contagion effect in some Filipino communities in which families become aware of the lucrative nature of live streamed child sexual abuse from others engaged in the activity locally and subsequently choose to participate. This can also be made easier by community members imparting knowledge of how to engage in live streaming. As noted above, it will also be supported by communities staying silent about the abuse occurring in their neighbourhood (Dedase-Escoton et al. 2020).

Discussion

Understanding the ecosystem of live streamed child sexual abuse as a series of relationships between entities offers a number of insights that may assist from a crime control perspective. These insights particularly relate to the role of service providers in the ecosystem, the relationship between consumers and facilitators and the relationship between facilitators and the community.

The role of service providers

Live streamed child sexual abuse exists because of the availability of the infrastructure that provides all of the elements necessary for the crime to occur. The infrastructure allows strangers to find each other through online social interaction, to develop a relationship, to negotiate price and schedule a live streamed event through private chat applications, to send money through an online financial system and to deliver live streamed child sexual abuse through an application offering live streamed video. All of this is possible with a low risk of being detected engaging in illegal behaviour. Service providers (hardware manufacturers, telecommunications companies, electronic service providers and financial service companies) all play a role in creating the infrastructure necessary for live streamed child sexual abuse, so without any one of those entities, the problem would cease to exist. It therefore follows that each could play a role in addressing its part in enabling this crime. Each could play a role in improving guardianship (Cohen & Felson 1979), often identified as an important aspect of situational crime prevention (Clarke 1980). Indeed, many of these service providers can be seen as the equivalent of place managers in the physical realm, who monitor activities in and around the buildings they manage and intervene when necessary (Eck 2003). Guardianship of this kind seems significantly underused in the digital realm, and this absence helps to fuel online harm (Brown 2022).

Relationship between consumers and facilitators

Consumers and facilitators will typically engage through the infrastructure described above, which provides the means to both communicate and make financial transactions. This infrastructure is used in a fairly rudimentary way. Popular messaging tools are used, many of which include end-to-end encryption as standard as well as live streaming capabilities, while payments are often made through regulated financial institutions. Intervening in either of these points of contact between consumers and facilitators may reduce the extent of the problem by increasing the effort involved in live streaming, or increasing the associated risk of detection (Clarke 1980). Certainly, there will be displacement from platforms where effort and risk are increased to other platforms, although such displacement is seldom complete, yielding at least some crime prevention dividend each time offending behaviour is disrupted. Positive spin-off effects are also likely, with the potential for diffusion of benefit to platforms where preventative action has yet to be taken (Guerette & Bowers 2009). Note that the use of the darknet for live streaming is rare, as is the use of cryptocurrencies, due largely to the lack of necessity—on the whole, live streaming has been able to continue to operate with minimal sophistication. If existing communication and financial platforms were tightened to the point where darknet solutions were needed (notwithstanding the data bandwidth issues associated with darknet use), migration would likely be partial due to the added complexities of such operations.

Perhaps more of a challenge are applications that offer a virtual one-stop-shop for live streamed child sexual abuse. Often designed for adult sexual content, these applications offer a means by which consumers may be able to make contact with facilitators or child victim-survivors directly, to make payment through in-app tokens and to view a live streamed performance. While overt advertising of children on such sites may be prohibited (leading to facilitator accounts being removed), consumers and facilitators may use coded language to refer to children that is difficult for moderators to detect (Sivathanan, Clahane & Kemoli 2025). While part of the ecosystem of live streamed child sexual abuse, these applications are unlikely to be the dominant method of live streaming in the short term because the transaction costs associated with trading in-app tokens can be high. This reduces the profitability for facilitators—especially when the conventional means of live streaming currently comes with minimal (if any) moderation and money being received directly into a mobile wallet with low transaction costs.

A final point to make about the relationship between facilitators and consumers is that facilitators tend to be concentrated in particular countries, rather than being found in equal numbers in many locations. The Philippines appears to be the longstanding epicentre for live streamed child sexual abuse and, from a crime prevention and harm reduction perspective, would be the best place to focus international efforts to intervene, as this is where the greatest impacts are likely to be made. This suggests the existing law enforcement focus on addressing live streaming in the Philippines is likely to yield better results than targeting other countries at this point. However, one must be alert to this being a self-fulfilling truism, given the Philippines may continue to be highlighted as a hub for live streamed child sexual abuse by virtue of the focused attention on that country.

Much less research appears to have been undertaken on the nature and extent of live streaming in countries beyond the Philippines. As highlighted by Table 1, live streaming has been reported in many other countries but little is known about the prevalence of abuse in these countries. However, there is an indication that live streaming is more likely to be found in middle-income countries—those neither too poor to have the technological and financial infrastructure to support live streaming, nor too rich to make the low prices consumers are willing to pay an inhibitor to facilitators engaging in the transaction. This offers a potential avenue for further research to help narrow the range of countries where live streaming may be found at scale.

Relationship between facilitators and the community

Moving beyond the online world, it is important to understand that facilitators live within a local community. Their social relationships can have both positive and negative impacts on the growth of live streamed child sexual abuse. Communities can create and perpetuate harm. What has been described as a contagion can spread in a community, where the economic benefits of live streaming become widely known, leading others to decide to engage in the same activity. This can be further reinforced by neighbours sharing the know-how required for live streaming. If not openly involved in the activity, neighbours may still be complicit through a shared culture of secrecy and unwillingness to meddle in the affairs of others. This suggests that, when law enforcement operations do target particular households, this should be seen as a starting point for further prevention and education activity in the local community, considering the issue as a wider societal concern, rather than viewing it as an individual pathology.

Communities may also play a positive role in addressing live streaming in a neighbourhood, by being encouraged to communicate shared values associated with child safety. There may also be opportunities to encourage community members to intervene and to report concerns to the relevant authorities.

Methods of organisation

The *Introduction* identified three methods of organisation by which live streaming is delivered. These included individual operations, family-run operations and cybersex dens. This study, based on previous literature, suggests that individual operations and family-run operations are common methods of organisation, and these underpin the relationships between consumers and facilitators or victim-survivors. Cybersex dens were less commonly identified in the literature, although a Pakistan-based operation was identified in the media (Ahmed 2025), and a media analysis by Hernandez et al. (2018) identified 20 cases of cybersex dens. These, however, appear to be the exceptions. It is unclear whether the infrequency with which cybersex dens were mentioned reflects their relative rarity, or whether the secrecy with which they operate means they are not generally identified in research studies. This is an issue that would benefit from further investigation.

Conclusions

This study has provided an overview of the available literature on the ecosystem of live streamed child sexual abuse. Perhaps three key lessons can be drawn from this analysis. Firstly, it is important to recognise that live streamed child sexual abuse is an infrastructure-enabled crime. It exists because global technological and financial systems make it easy for strangers to find each other, communicate privately, exchange money instantly, and transmit live video across borders. Hardware manufacturers, telecommunications networks, electronic service providers and financial platforms all unintentionally create the environment in which the crime occurs. Strengthening guardianship across these infrastructures is an essential step towards disrupting this activity.

Secondly, the ecosystem is sustained by relationships and not by isolated actors. Live streamed child sexual abuse persists because of durable, socially embedded relationships between consumers, facilitators, victim-survivors and communities. These relationships involve both cooperation (eg negotiation, payment and shared financial interest) and coercion (eg familial pressure and threats). Community norms, economic incentives and social contagion each play a role in sustaining the ecosystem at the local level. It therefore follows that effective interventions must target these relational dynamics.

Finally, the crime appears to concentrate where technological capacity and economic vulnerability intersect. There is some evidence to suggest that live streamed child sexual abuse flourishes in middle-income countries with strong digital infrastructure, high mobile phone penetration, accessible remittance systems and significant economic inequality. This ‘Goldilocks effect’ explains why the Philippines is the global epicentre and highlights where prevention and enforcement efforts are likely to have the greatest impact.

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