



EMBARGOED PRESS RELEASE

To be released after the study report is uploaded to IJM's website (www.ijm.org.ph/resources) on September 7, 2023, 2PM PHT

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Nearly half a million children sexually exploited in livestreams, new abuse images and videos in the Philippines last year

MANILA, PHILIPPINES – In 2022 alone, nearly half a million Filipino children, or roughly 1 in 100 children, were trafficked to produce child sexual exploitation material (CSEM) for profit, according to estimates from the pioneering *Scale of Harm* prevalence study by International Justice Mission (IJM) and the University of Nottingham Rights Lab.

Complementing other studies that broadly investigated online sexual abuse and exploitation of children, the *Scale of Harm* study specifically measured the prevalence of the production of CSEM, especially livestreamed child sexual abuse, for profit. In this crime, a local trafficker sexually abuses a Filipino child in person while a foreign offender, typically from Western or developed countries, watches the abuse happen in real time via video call.

“As a survivor who knows the pain of online sexual exploitation, the study’s findings underscore the urgency for stronger collective action to protect innocent children,” said Ruby (not her real name), a survivor leader and one of the survivor consultants who helped shape the study. “Co-designed by survivors, this study is informed by lived experiences. With recommendations involving government, tech and financial companies, civil society organizations, and individuals in our communities, this study marks a crucial step forward.”

Scale of Harm also estimates that nearly a quarter of a million adult Filipinos, or roughly 3 in every 1,000 adults, engaged in this type of trafficking last year. The study confirms that this crime is widespread across Luzon, Visayas, and Mindanao, yet it is underreported to authorities.

“The Philippine government has been relentless in combating the commission of online sexual abuse or exploitation of children and proliferation of child sexual abuse or exploitation material. We believe that the prevalence of this crime would have been significantly higher if not for the interventions made over the past several years by the Department of Justice, together with the other government agencies and civil society organizations. Nevertheless, this fight is far from over, and we must continue to intensify our efforts. Thus, we urge the public to become more actively involved by promptly reporting these crimes, as this will help safeguard more victims and swiftly bring traffickers to justice,” said Department of Justice – Inter-Agency Council Against Trafficking (IACAT) Undersecretary-in-charge Nicholas Ty.

IACAT was among the members of an external advisory council convened to assist in developing a methodology for the prevalence study.

Lawyer Samson Inocencio, Regional Vice President and National Director of IJM’s Program Against Online Sexual Exploitation of Children, said: “Collaborative efforts led by the Philippine government over the years have laid a strong foundation for curbing this technology-enabled crime. Along with other interventions, we need to continue safeguarding more victims and holding more perpetrators accountable. By doing so, we create deterrence and cultivate an environment that provides lasting protection for vulnerable children. The study has outlined clear steps that we can take together moving forward.”

As of August 2023, data from IJM-supported operations reveals that Philippine authorities have brought 1,181 victims and at-risk individuals to safety and apprehended 359 suspected perpetrators, with at least 202 of them already convicted.

IJM undertook *Scale of Harm* over the course of two years, in partnership with the University of Nottingham's Rights Lab in the U.K and several world-class experts, researchers, and field practitioners from organizations across the technology, financial, government, and child protection sectors.

“The study marks a significant leap forward in understanding the scale of selling livestreamed and new images and videos of child sexual abuse in the Philippines. Building on the previous 2020 OSEC study led by IJM, *Scale of Harm* employed rigorous methodologies, including national household surveys and data analysis, to provide a comprehensive assessment of the crime's prevalence. It also incorporated valuable inputs from survivors through their involvement in survey design and focus group discussions,” said Rights Lab Director Prof. Zoe Trodd.

Survivors identified gaps in awareness and understanding of trafficking to produce CSEM, as well as limited public knowledge of identifying exploitative online behaviors. They also shared tactics employed by traffickers to conceal illegal activities and cited socio-cultural factors contributing to underreporting, particularly in cases with existing victim-trafficker relationships.

Scale of Harm has introduced urgent recommendations to address the trafficking of children to produce new CSEM. Governments, NGOs, community leaders, and the public are urged to intensify their efforts in increasing the reporting of this crime. Law enforcement agencies are called upon to heighten actions not only against local traffickers but also remote offenders abroad.

The study recommends local initiatives that focus on changing community norms and raising awareness. Survivor-led community sensitization is seen as a powerful tool to drive these changes and create deterrence at the local level.

Additionally, the study highlights the necessity of enforcing government regulations requiring the use of safety by design technology. This technology is crucial for preventing the creation and distribution of CSEM. The private sector is also urged to play its part by enhancing detection and reporting mechanisms on technology platforms, encouraging collaboration among tech, finance, and law enforcement.

Survivors urged researchers to look into how trafficking to produce CSEM becomes normalized, particularly concerning foreign offenders engaging in relationships with minors and local traffickers who seek financial gain.

Meanwhile, a global call to action urges governments to enact online safety laws, with survivor input.

“Other studies have found that demand-side offenders are commonly based in the United States, the United Kingdom, Australia, Canada, Europe, and other Western or developed countries. They exploit the financial disparity between them and traffickers to abuse children, paying Philippine-based traffickers by international money transfer to livestream abuse and send new child abuse images and videos. This means that effectively protecting children from this crime and reducing its prevalence requires greater global collaboration and radically improved tech and financial sector detection, reporting, and prevention on their platforms,” said John Tanagho, Executive Director of IJM's Center to End Online Sexual Exploitation of Children.

IJM released the prevalence study findings today at an event co-organized by Kumu and Sofitel Philippine Plaza Manila, in the presence of over a hundred key government, civil society, and private sector partners.

To report information about online child sexual exploitation, contact the Philippine National Police – Women and Children Protection Center at 0966-725-5961 (Globe) and 0919-777-7377 (Smart).

Visit ijm.org.ph to access the summary report. The full report will be available on Sept. 14, 2023, after an online global launch of the study results. ###

Additional Quotes from Global Leaders:

“Alarming findings from the new IJM Scale of Harm survey reveal that nearly half a million children in the Philippines have been trafficked to produce child sexual exploitation material, often by relatives or people they know. However, this issue transcends borders: where we look for these crimes, we uncover them, and once these abusive images and videos are online, they can be accessed and shared by perpetrators all over the world. Responses to this threat must therefore be global, coordinated, and guided by both evidence and the voices of survivors, just as this study’s recommendations have been.”

- **Iain Drennan, Executive Director, WeProtect Global Alliance**

“IJM’s Scale of Harm provides alarming insights into the magnitude of child sexual exploitation in the Philippines, especially the prevalence of live streaming, on demand child sexual exploitation and child sex traffickers exploiting victims to produce child sexual abuse imagery. Every day, the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children provides thousands of CyberTipline reports to the Philippine National Police regarding child sexual exploitation. We strongly support IJM’s Scale of Harm key recommendations to better protect children.”

- **John Shehan, Senior Vice President, Exploited Children Division & International Engagement - The National Center for Missing & Exploited Children**

“The Australian Institute of Criminology has been pleased to support International Justice Mission’s Scale of Harm project as a member of the initiative’s External Advisory Council. Through our own work, we have recognised the harm caused to children in the Philippines by perpetrators who purchase livestreamed child sexual abuse. This project has helped to clarify the extent of that harm, using robust scientific methods to generate an understanding of the problem that has not previously been possible. We believe this study will help to drive further action to protect future generations of children from experiencing online sexual exploitation.”

- **Dr. Rick Brown, Deputy Director, Australian Institute of Criminology**

Notes to Editors:

- The Scale of Harm study exclusively focused on one specific form of online child sexual exploitation: *the trafficking of children to produce new child sexual exploitation material (CSEM)* in livestreamed videos, images, and recorded videos. It is distinct from other forms of online sexual exploitation of children, such as sextortion, grooming, sharing of known CSEM, or self-produced sexual imagery.
- The Terminology Guidelines for the Protection of Children from Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse, also known as the Luxembourg Guidelines, prescribes the use of the term “child sexual abuse material (CSAM)” or “child sexual exploitation material (CSEM)” instead of “child pornography”. Sexualized material that depicts or otherwise represents children is a representation, and a form, of child sexual abuse and should not be described as “pornography.”

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About IJM

International Justice Mission is a global organization that protects people in poverty from violence. IJM partners with local authorities in 31 program offices in 16 countries to rescue and restore survivors, hold perpetrators accountable, and help strengthen public justice systems so they can better protect people from violence.

IJM's work in the Philippines led to a dramatic decrease in the prevalence of sex trafficking of children in bars and brothels—reductions ranging from 72%-86% in the cities where we partnered with local authorities. In 2016, IJM fully transitioned our program in the Philippines to combat online sexual exploitation of children, in particular the trafficking of children to produce new child sexual abuse materials, including via livestreaming.

Learn more: IJM.org.ph

About the University of Nottingham

Ranked in the Top 100 globally and 17th in the UK by the [QS World University Rankings 2024](#), the University of Nottingham is a founding member of Russell Group of research-intensive universities. Studying at the University of Nottingham is a life-changing experience, and we pride ourselves on unlocking the potential of our students. We have a pioneering spirit, expressed in the vision of our founder Sir Jesse Boot, which has seen us lead the way in establishing campuses in China and Malaysia - part of a globally connected network of education, research and industrial engagement. The University is among the best universities in the UK for the strength of our research, positioned seventh for research power in the UK according to [REF 2021](#). The birthplace of discoveries such as MRI and ibuprofen, our [innovations](#) transform lives and tackle global problems such as sustainable food supplies, ending modern slavery, developing greener transport, and reducing reliance on fossil fuels. The University is a major employer and industry partner - locally and globally - and our graduates are the second most targeted by the UK's top employers, according to The Graduate Market in 2022 report by High Fliers Research. We lead the [Universities for Nottingham](#) initiative, in partnership with Nottingham Trent University, a pioneering collaboration between the city's two world-class institutions to improve levels of prosperity, opportunity, sustainability, health and wellbeing for residents in the city and region we are proud to call home.

About Kumu

Kumu is the largest social entertainment app in the Philippines, proudly made by Pinoys. Our mission is to be the platform that champions Filipino voices from across the world, creating a vibrant online culture filled with positivity and possibilities. Named after the iconic Tagalog greeting "Kumusta ka?", kumu embodies that same warmth and fun-loving spirit of Filipinos, amplified by our unique innovations in livestreaming and social media.

About Sofitel Philippine Plaza Manila

Sofitel Philippine Plaza Manila is the only 5-star urban resort property in the metro. The iconic property showcases the French art de vivre blended with the gracious and heartfelt warmth of the Filipino spirit. Designed by National Artists Leandro Locsin and Idefonso P. Santos, Sofitel Philippine Plaza Manila channels the true meaning of luxury meets sophistication.

With 607 well-appointed rooms, 17 ballrooms and function rooms including 2 marquees and 4 international dining destinations with its flagship restaurant, Spiral, the hotel property has been the hotel of choice to stage celebrations and milestones.