

# Our Voice: Survivor Experiences of Online Abuse

Understanding the Distinct Impacts of Online  
and Offline Child Sexual Abuse and Exploitation



**#OurVoice**

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## Acknowledgements

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**Protect Children** is a non-governmental child-rights organisation based in Finland, working globally to end all forms of sexual violence against children. We adopt a holistic, research-based approach to address the issue from multiple angles.

The **Justice Initiative** is a European initiative aiming to restore justice for past victims of abuse across Europe and strengthen child protection for future generations. Protect Children, the leader of the Justice Initiative Nordic Hub, developed the Global Our Voice Survivor Survey with support from the Justice Initiative.

The **International Policing and Public Protection Research Institute (IPPPRI)** is part of Anglia Ruskin University. Its vision is to use applied research to support the global response to exploitation and abuse in all its forms. IPPPRI's team of researchers are committed to delivering world-leading research innovation with international impact.

This report contains direct quotes from survivors related to child sexual abuse. Some content may be distressing or triggering for readers, particularly those with lived experience of trauma. Please take care while reading and seek support if needed.



*No one ever actually touched me or sexually abused me, but I still felt violated.*

*I didn't know that sexual violence could happen over the phone when I was so young.*

Survivor of online child sexual abuse and exploitation in response to the Global Our Voice Survivor Survey (English-speaking)





## Introduction

Child sexual abuse and exploitation (CSAE) is a widespread violation of children’s rights, affecting millions of children around the world.<sup>1</sup> It occurs across a continuum of online and offline environments, with technology increasingly shaping how abuse is initiated and facilitated.<sup>2</sup> While research has traditionally focused on in-person abuse, there is growing recognition that abuse which is facilitated by technology presents unique dynamics, as well as distinct impacts on victims and survivors.

Online and technology-facilitated abuse can include grooming, coercion to create sexual content (including a child being manipulated or forced to perform sexual violence on themselves), livestreamed abuse, image-based abuse, and the recording or distribution of child sexual abuse material (CSAM) through digital platforms. Despite its severe and lasting impacts,<sup>3</sup> this form of abuse is still often minimised or misunderstood, even by law enforcement and child protection professionals.<sup>4</sup>

Less attention has been paid to how experiences differ between individuals who experience abuse exclusively online, exclusively offline or across both contexts. Understanding these differences is important for ensuring that support services, policy responses and prevention efforts effectively address the diverse realities of survivor experiences.

This report presents findings from an anonymous survey of nearly 25,000 adult survivors of child sexual abuse and exploitation from around the world. We examine the experiences of three groups of survivors who responded to the survey: those who experienced abuse exclusively online (online abuse survivors), those who experienced both online and offline abuse (mixed abuse survivors), and those who experienced abuse exclusively offline (in-person

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<sup>1</sup> Stoltenborgh, M., van IJzendoorn, M. H., Euser, E. M., & Bakermans-Kranenburg, M. J. (2011). A global perspective on child sexual abuse: Meta-analysis of prevalence around the world. *Child Maltreatment*, 16(2), 79–101. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1077559511403920>

<sup>2</sup> ECPAT International. (2020). Summary paper on online child sexual exploitation. <https://ecpat.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/ECPAT-Summary-paper-on-Online-Child-Sexual-Exploitation-2020.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> Hamilton-Giachritsis, C., Hanson, E., Whittle, H., & Beech, A. (2017). “Everyone deserves to be happy and safe”: A mixed methods study exploring how online and offline child sexual abuse impact young people and how professionals respond to it. NSPCC. <https://learning.nspcc.org.uk/media/1123/impact-online-offline-child-sexual-abuse.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> Hamilton-Giachritsis, C., Hanson, E., Whittle, H., & Beech, A. (2017). “Everyone deserves to be happy and safe”: A mixed methods study exploring how online and offline child sexual abuse impact young people and how professionals respond to it. NSPCC. <https://learning.nspcc.org.uk/media/1123/impact-online-offline-child-sexual-abuse.pdf>

abuse survivors). We find that these groups differ in meaningful ways across key indicators, including characteristics of abuse, perpetrator dynamics, disclosure, and long-term impacts.

The findings highlight the importance of recognising online abuse as a distinct and significant form of harm, while also acknowledging the compounded risks associated with abuse occurring across multiple contexts.

Throughout the report, we amplify the voices of victims and survivors by presenting quotes directly from survey respondents who have experienced online and mixed abuse. In doing so, we aim to address longstanding gaps in knowledge, reduce stigma, and inform services, policies, and public understanding of the realities of childhood sexual violence.

## Methodology

### Data

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Data were collected through the [Global Our Voice Survivor Survey](#), an anonymous international survey of adults who have experienced sexual violence in childhood. The aim of the survey is to amplify the voices and lived experiences of victims and survivors. A full overview of the methodology is available here: [www.suojellaanlapsia.fi/en/post/our-voice-global-report](http://www.suojellaanlapsia.fi/en/post/our-voice-global-report).

### Sample

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Between 4 November 2023 and 30 November 2025, 24,912 individuals responded to the survey.

### Group Classification

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In order to examine the differing experiences of survivors of different forms of abuse, respondents were categorised into three groups based on whether they reported that their abuse was facilitated by technology and whether they indicated experiences consistent with offline abuse. Technology facilitated abuse was identified where respondents specifically indicated that the abuse occurred online or was enabled in some way through technology.<sup>5</sup> In-person abuse was identified where respondents reported experiences involving physical contact or other forms of abuse that were highly likely to have occurred in person.<sup>6</sup> See Table 1 for the group definitions, classification criteria, and sample size.

### Analytical Approach

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Group differences were examined using appropriate statistical tests, including analysis of variance and regression models. Age was included as a control variable in all analyses.




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<sup>5</sup> Respondents who selected “Yes” to the question “Did the sexual violence you were subjected to as a child happen online (completely or partially) or was it in some way facilitated by technology?” were classified as having experienced online or technology facilitated abuse.

<sup>6</sup> Respondents who, in response to the multiple response question “What happened?”, reported any of the following offline abuse indicators were classified as having experienced offline abuse: penetration, imitated penetration, oral sexual acts, sexual touching of nude genitals, sexual touching while clothed, showing genitals in person, sexual acts involving another child under coercion.

## Respondent Characteristics

**Table 1: Respondent Characteristics**

	 <b>Online abuse</b> N = 192 (0.8%)	 <b>Mixed abuse</b> N = 2,276 (9.1%)	 <b>In-person abuse</b> N = 22,444 (90.1%)
<b>Definition</b>	Survivors who experienced abuse exclusively online or through technology-facilitated means.	Survivors who experienced both online or technology-facilitation and offline abuse.	Survivors who experienced abuse exclusively offline.
<b>Classification criteria</b>	Technology facilitated abuse: Yes Offline abuse indicator: None	Technology facilitated abuse: Yes Offline abuse indicator: At least one	Technology facilitated abuse: No
<b>Age</b>			
18-24 years old	32.8%	34.9%	8.0%
25-34 years old	29.7%	21.0%	13.1%
35-44 years old	12.0%	12.8%	24.4%
45-54 years old	10.9%	11.9%	26.2%
55-64 years old	7.8%	11.9%	19.8%
65-74 years old	6.2%	5.5%	7.2%
75+ years old	0.5%	2.0%	1.2%
<b>Gender</b>			
Male	4.7%	7.1%	6.0%
Female	83.9%	84.1%	91.3%
Other	2.1%	2.1%	0.6%
Non-binary	6.8%	3.9%	1.0%
Prefer not to say	1.6%	1.4%	0.4%
N/A	1.0%	1.5%	0.7%
<b>How they met perpetrator</b>	Online (37%) Social circle (26%) Same household (22%)	Social circle (52%) Same household (38%) Online (30%)	Social circle (48%) Same household (38%) Community (21%)
<b>Most common types of abuse experienced</b>	Sexual requests or suggestions (39.1%) Virtual genital exposure (30.2%) Being made to watch sexually explicit material or acts (23.4%) Production of sexual images or videos (13.0%)	Sexual touching while clothed (63.4%) Genital exposure in-person (54.7%) Sexual touching of nude genitals (54.6%) Virtual genital exposure (51.1%)	Sexual touching while clothed (49.6%) Sexual touching of nude genitals (45.7%) Genital exposure in-person (31.9%) Imitated penetration (24.2%) Oral sexual acts (22.2%) Penetration (22.0%)

# Overview of Key Findings

The findings highlight important differences and shared patterns across survivors of online, in-person, and mixed forms of abuse, while also underscoring the pervasive and long-term impact of all abuse types.

- **Online abuse survivors tended to be slightly older at the onset of abuse**, beginning on average around age 10, compared with around age 8 for in-person abuse survivors. Mixed abuse survivors fell between these groups, reflecting varied victimisation pathways.
- **Trafficking and commercial sexual exploitation** was substantially more common among survivors whose abuse involved an online element, affecting 14% of online and 11% of mixed abuse survivors compared with 2% of in-person abuse survivors.
- **Most survivors knew the perpetrator prior to the abuse**, including 61% of online abuse survivors and 88% of mixed abuse survivors, challenging the “stranger danger” narrative in the context of online abuse.
- **Online abuse survivors were the least likely to have disclosed the abuse**; however, among those who did disclose, they tended to do so sooner than survivors of in-person abuse.
- Survivors in the online and mixed abuse groups more frequently reported **shame as a barrier to disclosure** compared with in-person abuse survivors. Survivors of abuse with an online element were also significantly more likely to report **not disclosing because they did not think the abuse was serious enough**, with this barrier most commonly reported in the online abuse group.
- On average, **mixed abuse survivors reported 6.3 different long-term consequences, compared to 4.7 among in-person abuse survivors and 5.3 among online abuse survivors**. Although the overall pattern of long-term consequences was broadly similar across all three groups, **sexual dysfunction was notably more prevalent among online abuse survivors**.
- **More than half of survivors reported receiving no support after disclosure**. Online abuse survivors were most likely to receive some support (45%) and to have their disclosure lead to a police investigation, but they were less likely than other groups to receive professional support, relying more often on family and friends. Prosecution or sentencing was most commonly reported among in-person abuse survivors.

# 1. Experiences of Sexual Violence

## Age at First Abuse

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**Online abuse survivors were on average 10 years old when the abuse began.** There was a significant difference in the age at which survivors first experienced abuse.<sup>7</sup> Online abuse survivors were, on average, older at the time of first victimisation<sup>8</sup> than survivors of mixed and in-person abuse.<sup>9</sup> Online abuse survivors were around 10 years old on average when the abuse began, compared to around 8 years old among in-person abuse survivors.<sup>10</sup> The reported ages represent approximate mean values, as participants were provided with age ranges rather than exact ages. Therefore, the reported ages reflect averaged estimates rather than precise ages.

The average age of first victimisation of mixed abuse survivors falls between that of online and in-person abuse survivors, with abuse beginning at an average age of around 9 years old, likely reflecting the varied pathways through which abuse occurred within this group rather than a single, uniform pattern of victimisation.

**In-person abuse survivors reported the youngest age at first abuse.** One in three (33%) reported that the abuse began between the ages of 3 and 6,<sup>11</sup> compared to 15% of online abuse survivors.



In the then popular Habbo Hotel, an unknown adult man asked, among other things, whether my breasts had grown. I was 7 years old at the time and he knew it.

Survivor of online abuse (Finnish-speaking)



The Internet became more and more common when I was a child, and I was often on chat sites when I was about 13 and up. Got in touch with a lot of men, and the fact that I was 13 was no problem for them.

Survivor of online abuse (Norwegian-speaking)



There used to be a messenger called Kik. I had it when I was 12-14. There, men would randomly send me their genitals or send CSAM material to thematic groups. They knew how old I was. At 14, I regularly received rape threats from anonymous Twitter users because I was trans. It lasted until I was 19.

Survivor of online abuse (Polish-speaking)

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<sup>7</sup>  $F(1,2) = 101.89, p < .001$ .




<sup>8</sup>  $M = 3.85, SD = 1.19$ ; all group differences at  $p < .001$ .

<sup>9</sup>  $M = 3.35, SD = 1.27$ .

<sup>10</sup> Note: These averages are approximations as participants were presented with age ranges not individual years.

<sup>11</sup>  $M = 3.11, SD = 1.13$ .

**Table 2: Age at first abuse**

	 <b>Online abuse</b> N = 192 (0.8%)	 <b>Mixed abuse</b> N = 2,276 (9.1%)	 <b>In-person abuse</b> N = 22,444 (90.1%)
<b>Age at first abuse</b>			
0-2 years old	1.0%	3.8%	2.1%
3-6 years old	14.6%	<b>25.7%</b>	<b>33.0%</b>
7-9 years old	19.8%	23.7%	30.0%
10-12 years old	<b>27.6%</b>	22.1%	19.2%
13-15 years old	27.1%	16.6%	10.4%
16-17 years old	5.2%	4.0%	2.6%
<NA>	4.7%	4.1%	2.8%

## Nature of Abuse

**There were clear differences between groups in the type of abuse experiences reported.**

**Online abuse most commonly involved sexual requests and virtual exposure.** Online abuse survivors most commonly reported having experienced sexual requests or suggestions (39%) and virtual genital exposure (30%). Other commonly reported experiences included being made to watch sexually explicit material or acts (23%), production of sexual images or videos (13%), and experiences involving coercion or exchange (7%). A notable proportion also reported “other” experiences (33.9%). No contact abuse types are reported in this group, as respondents were classified into the online abuse group based on the absence of indicators consistent with in person or contact based abuse in the grouping procedure.

“ The first time, and also later times, technology was what made the “violence” possible. I have never been raped or anything like that, but I have seen disturbing things. Like pornography when I was far too young, but also a man actively trying to get me and my friend to undress on a video-call app for children.  
Survivor of online abuse (Swedish-speaking)




**Mixed abuse commonly involved both contact abuse and virtual exposure.** Mixed abuse survivors reported the widest range of abuse types, including both non-contact and contact experiences. Over half reported sexual touching while clothed (63%), genital exposure in person (55%), sexual touching of nude genitals (55%), and virtual genital exposure (51%). Around one third reported oral sexual acts (33%), imitated penetration (33%), and penetration (30%).

“ I've had old men jerk off to me on Omegle. I've been contacted on various sites, mainly on Instagram, and the older men have always deliberately wanted to chat with a child.  
Survivor of online abuse (Finnish-speaking)

“ At his request, I had to make a video call where I masturbated in front of him.  
Survivor of online abuse (French-speaking)

**Sexual touching was the most commonly reported form of in-person abuse.** In-person abuse survivors most commonly reported sexual touching while clothed (50%), sexual touching of nude genitals (46%), and genital exposure in person (32%). Reports of non-contact and technology facilitated experiences were lower in this group.

**Table 3: Types of abuse experienced** <sup>12</sup>

	 <b>Online abuse</b> N = 192 (0.8%)	 <b>Mixed abuse</b> N = 2,276 (9.1%)	 <b>In-person abuse</b> N = 22,444 (90.1%)
<b>Non-contact abuse types</b>			
Sexual requests or suggestions	39.1%	38.4%	15.5%
Virtual genital exposure	30.2%	51.1%	0.0%
Performing sexual acts in exchange for goods or under coercion	6.8%	12.7%	3.9%
Production of sexual images or videos	13.0%	21.0%	2.8%
Being made to watch sexually explicit material or acts	23.4%	29.4%	9.3%
Other	33.9%	11.9%	11.9%
<b>Contact abuse types</b> <sup>13</sup>			
Genital exposure in-person	-	54.7%	31.9%
Sexual touching of clothed genitals	-	63.4%	49.6%
Sexual touching of nude genitals	-	54.6%	45.7%
Oral sexual acts	-	32.8%	22.2%
Imitated penetration	-	33.3%	24.2%
Penetration	-	29.7%	22.0%
Sexual acts involving another child under coercion	-	16.4%	7.0%

<sup>12</sup> Respondents could select multiple options.

<sup>13</sup> The online abuse group is defined based on the absence of reported indicators of physical contact or other indicators consistent with in-person abuse. These contact abuse items are therefore not applicable to respondents in the online abuse group.

**CSAM related experiences more common among online and mixed abuse survivors.** The production of sexual images or videos during the abuse was reported by 21% of mixed abuse survivors and 13% of online abuse survivors, compared to a smaller proportion of in person abuse survivors (3%).



I was involved in the production of CSAM/CSEM, so while it initially wasn't online, when that became an option it was quickly added there. It spread and was the first available wave for the online market before more groups learned how and produced new material.

Survivor of mixed abuse (English-speaking)



I was recorded to produce child pornography.

Survivor of online abuse (Spanish-speaking)

**Commercial sexual exploitation was more common when abuse included an online element.** Experiences related to trafficking and commercial sexual exploitation were considerably more common among online and mixed abuse survivors. Such experiences were reported by 14% of online abuse survivors and 11% of mixed abuse survivors, compared to 2% of in-person abuse survivors.



I was a child exploitation survivor, in organized abuse. As soon as technology became available - even earlier than the public in some cases - it was used to share CSAMs and communicate with me.

Survivor of online abuse (English-speaking)



In the chat room of the love room, a man about 45 years old offered me 400 kroons if I would have sex with him. I was 14 years old. At first, I refused, but later I agreed because I wanted money. I had never had such a thing happen to me before.

Survivor of online abuse (Estonian-speaking)



Initially to get the reward for an on-line game, I was coerced into playing strip poker, and this led to further actions.

Survivor of online abuse (English-speaking)

**Most survivors reported that they were subjected to abuse or exploitation on multiple occasions.** This was particularly reported by mixed abuse survivors (89%), followed by survivors of in-person abuse (81%), and survivors of online-only abuse (69%).



My first instance was conducted through the forums on Moshi Monsters, a children's game online at the time. Kids would share links to video chats to have with each other and I was then directed by someone to have a video chat in a room alone. My second instance was with someone I met on Twitch. My third instance was someone I met on Twitter. My fourth instance was a member of staff at school but much of the grooming happened on Twitter dms (direct messages).

Survivor of online abuse (English-speaking)



Chat forums like Knuddels.de led to my friend and me being repeatedly sexually harassed (via chat). There were several situations in which adults chatted with us using webcams and masturbated.

Survivor of online abuse (German-speaking)



On Omegle, older men masturbated in front of me. I received contact requests on various sites, mainly Instagram, and it was always older men who knowingly wanted to talk to a child.

Survivor of online abuse (Finnish-speaking)

## Perpetrator Characteristics

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**Online abuse more often involved multiple perpetrators.** 47% of online abuse survivors and 57% of mixed abuse survivors reported that the abuse was committed by multiple perpetrators, compared to 36% of in-person abuse survivors.



During my puberty (ages 12-14), I was repeatedly a victim of grooming. I was targeted by at least five different people whom I met through the internet.

Survivor of mixed abuse (Spanish-speaking)



Adults contacted me through Snapchat; later a person wrote to me on Facebook claiming to be around my age.

Survivor of online abuse (Polish-speaking)

**Most online abuse survivors knew the perpetrator before the abuse began.** This was most common among in-person abuse survivors (92%), and mixed abuse survivors (88%), however it was still prevalent among online abuse survivors (61%). Of those who knew the perpetrator, the perpetrator was most commonly someone from within their or their family's circle of trust. This was the case for survivors of in-person abuse (91%), mixed abuse (87%), and online abuse (77%).

**Online abuse survivors more likely to have met the perpetrator online.** 37% of online abuse survivors and 30% of mixed abuse survivors report that they met the perpetrator online, compared to 1% of in-person abuse survivors. Despite this, many online abuse survivors also reported that the perpetrator was someone they already knew: 26% reported that it was someone from their social circle, and 22% someone in their same household.



I received sexually suggestive messages through Facebook Messenger from adults I knew.

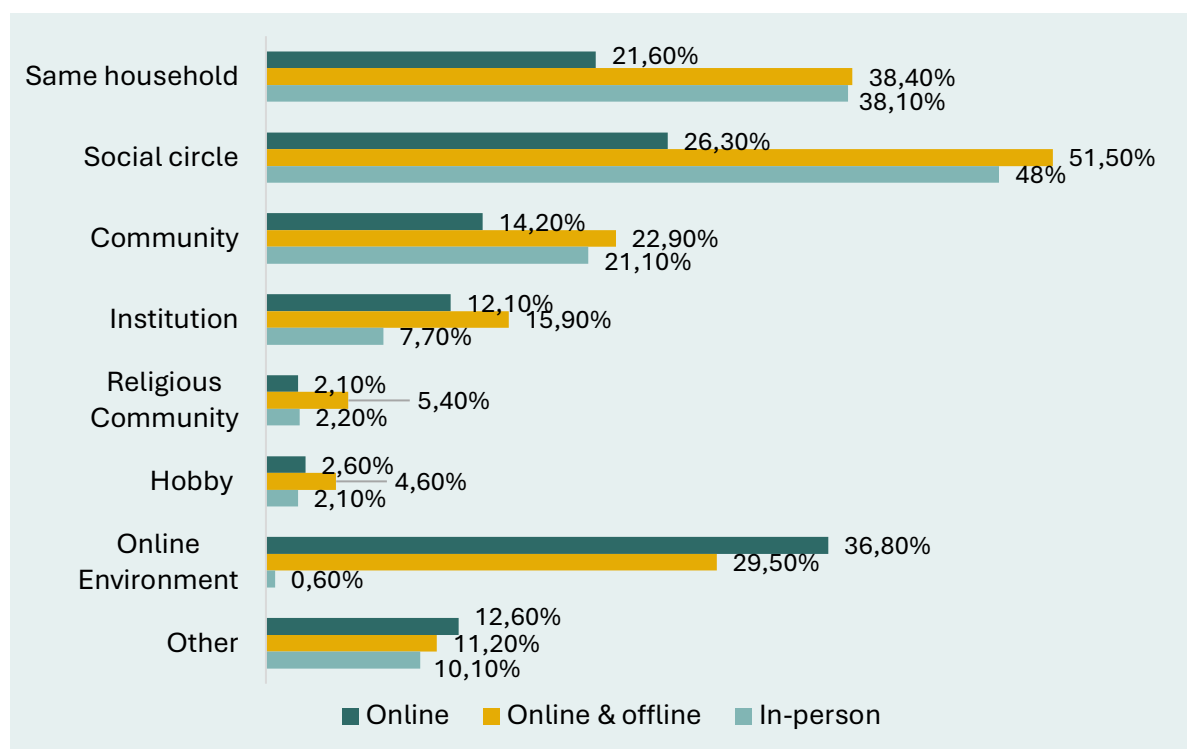
Survivor of online abuse (Finnish-speaking)



I was first subjected to sexual abuse by my brother (ages 9-15) and later to online sexual abuse (from about age 10), and later also sex trafficking (from about age 12).

Survivor of mixed abuse (Swedish-speaking)

**Figure 1: How respondents knew or met the perpetrator(s)**



**Perpetrators of all abuse types were predominantly adult men.** The vast majority of survivors of online (94%), mixed (97%), and in-person (97%) abuse reported that the perpetrator was male. Most survivors also reported that the perpetrator was over 18 years old at the time of abuse, including 75% of online abuse survivors, 69% of in-person abuse survivors, and 59% of mixed abuse survivors.

**Online abuse was less likely than in-person abuse to be perpetrated by under 18s.**




Survivors of in-person abuse and mixed abuse were more likely than online abuse survivors to report perpetrators under the age of 18. Mixed abuse survivors were the most likely to report both adult and child perpetrators,<sup>14</sup> consistent with the finding that they more frequently experienced abuse by multiple perpetrators. See Table 3.

“ I met my abuser on Omegle and he used the app kik to sexually exploit me. Our “relationship” lasted a decade and started when I was just 14. He was in his 50’s at the time. I was so madly in love with this man. He never loved me. I was simply an object for him to exploit.  
Survivor of mixed abuse (English-speaking)

“ From my earliest childhood, as I now understand correctly, I was sexually abused. Not directly physically, but emotionally. [...] Later I was raped by my peers because I was not taught how to defend myself. And I had become used to it, thinking it was normal.  
Survivor of online abuse (Latvian-speaking)

<sup>14</sup> Respondents could select multiple options.

**Table 4: Perpetrator characteristics**

	 <b>Online abuse</b> N = 192 (0.8%)	 <b>Mixed abuse</b> N = 2,276 (9.1%)	 <b>In-person abuse</b> N = 22,444 (90.1%)
<b>Perpetrator age</b>			
Under 18 years old	9.9%	15.2%	17.6%
Over 18 years old	<b>75.0%</b>	<b>59.0%</b>	<b>68.7%</b>
Both	8.9%	21.2%	10.7%
N/A	6.2%	4.6%	2.9%
<b>Perpetrator gender</b>			
Male	<b>94.3%</b>	<b>95.8%</b>	<b>96.8%</b>
Female	13.5%	13.9%	7.6%
Non-binary	1.0%	1.0%	0.1%
Other	1.0%	0.4%	0.2%
<b>How they met perpetrator</b>			
Same household	22%	38%	38%
Social circle	26%	<b>52%</b>	<b>48%</b>
Community	14%	23%	21%
Institution	12%	16%	8%
Religious community	2%	5%	2%
Hobby	3%	5%	2%
Online	<b>37%</b>	30%	1%
Other	13%	11%	10%

## 2. Disclosure

### Disclosure Time

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**Online abuse survivors least likely to have disclosed the abuse.** Across groups, most survivors had disclosed the childhood sexual violence they experienced. Mixed abuse survivors were the most likely to have disclosed (69%), followed by in-person abuse survivors (68%), and online abuse survivors (64%). The differences across groups were relatively small, however in-person abuse survivors were significantly more likely to have disclosed compared to online abuse survivors.<sup>15</sup>



The experience that happened when I was 7 years old was so traumatic that I didn't remember it until about 15 years later.

Survivor of mixed abuse (Finnish-speaking)

**One in three survivors had never disclosed.** In all groups, there were many survivors who reported that they had never disclosed the abuse. This was the case for 31% of mixed survivors, 32% on in-person abuse survivors, and 36% of online abuse survivors.



I had never said it, let alone written it. I feel slightly nervous despite the time that has passed. I still haven't gotten over it.

Survivor of online abuse (Spanish-speaking)



He threatened to spread pictures and videos if I told anyone. I blamed myself completely.

Survivor of mixed abuse (Swedish-speaking)

**Online abuse survivors who had disclosed did so sooner.** Among survivors who had disclosed the abuse, there were differences in the time it took to disclose across the three groups. Survivors of in-person abuse generally took longer to disclose<sup>16</sup>, while survivors of online abuse often disclosed sooner<sup>17</sup>. Mixed abuse survivors reported disclosure times between these two groups.<sup>18</sup>

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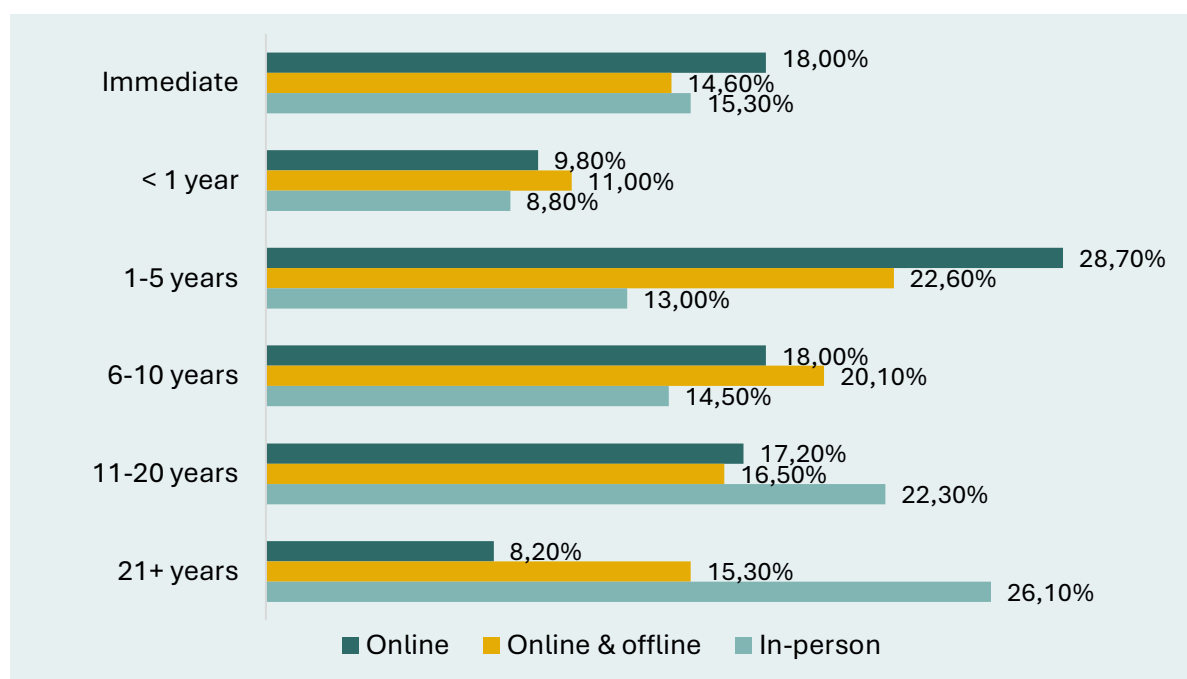
<sup>15</sup> Overall model :  $\chi^2(3) = 114.98, p < .001$ , Nagelkerke  $R^2 = .0$ .  $B = .31, p = .040, CI = 0.54;0.99$ .

<sup>16</sup>  $M = 3.98, SD = 1.77$ .

<sup>17</sup>  $M = 3.31, SD = 1.53$ .

<sup>18</sup>  $M = 3.59, SD = 1.61$ .

**Figure 2: How long it took survivors to disclose**



## Disclosure Recipients

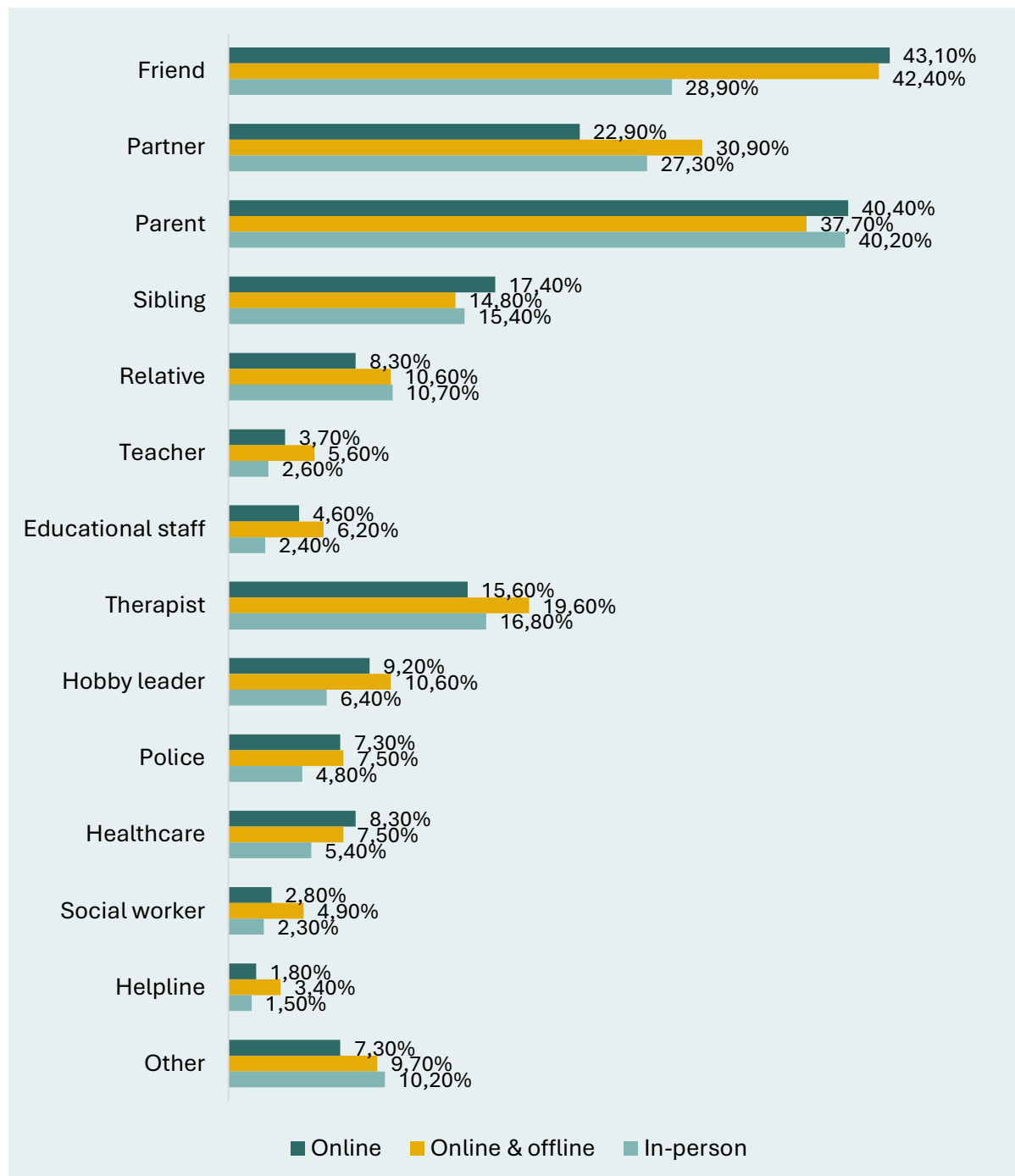
**All survivors most likely to disclose to a friend, parent, or partner.** While there were some differences in who survivors of different abuse types disclosed to, the recipients of disclosure were broadly similar across the groups. See Figure 3.

**Survivors of abuse with an online element were most likely to disclose to a friend.** This was reported by 43% of online abuse survivors and 42% of mixed abuse survivors, compared to 29% of in-person abuse survivors.

**Survivors of all abuse types likely to disclose to a parent.** Parents were frequently mentioned as recipients of disclosure, at similar rates across groups: 40% of mixed abuse survivors, 40% of online abuse survivors, and 38% of in-person abuse survivors.

**Survivors of abuse with an in-person element more likely to disclose to a partner.** Around three in ten survivors who had disclosed to someone did so to their partner. This was more common among survivors whose abuse had an in-person element, reported by 31% of mixed abuse survivors and 27% of in-person abuse survivors, compared with 23% of online abuse survivors.

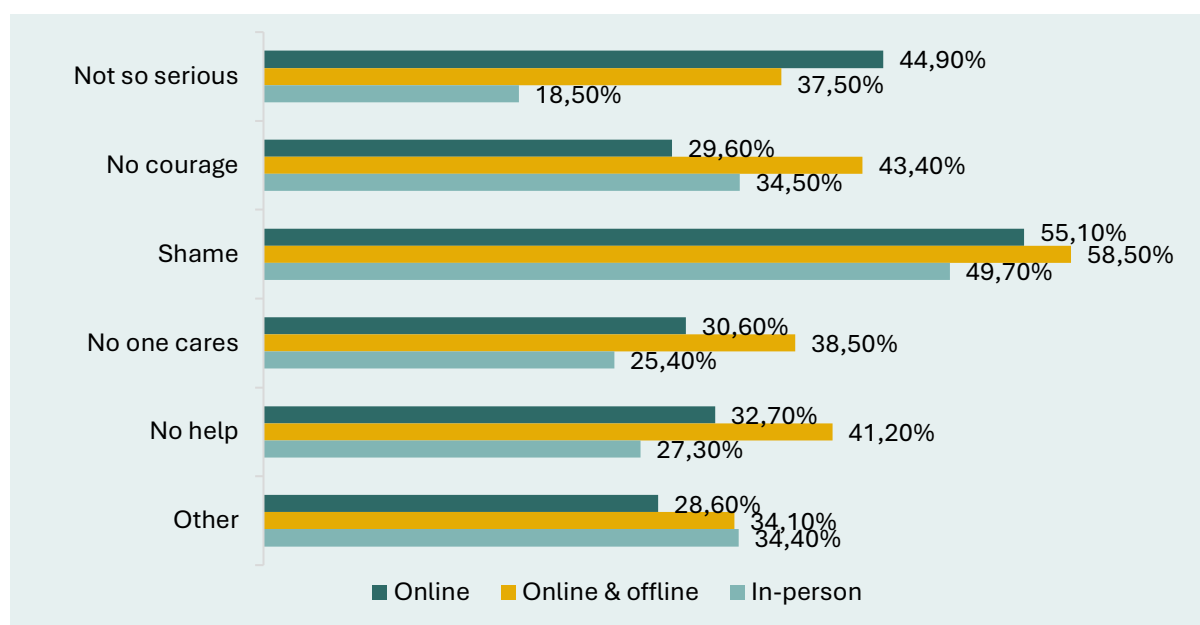
**Figure 3: To whom survivors first disclosed**



## Barriers to Disclosure

**Survivors reported multiple barriers to disclosure.** Survivors reported many reasons why they did not disclose the abuse or exploitation immediately after it happened, including shame, not thinking it was serious enough to disclose, not believing that disclosing would help, not having the courage, and not believing that anyone would care.

**Figure 4: Barriers to disclosure immediately following the sexual violence**



“ Since I was looking for some form of love, I didn't think it was violence since I often consented to sexual acts taking place. I was aware that I was underage, but thought much more responsibility fell on me so I accepted that it was partly my fault.

Survivor of online abuse (Norwegian-speaking)

“ I thought disclosing it would make everything worse for all of us.

Survivor of online abuse (English-speaking)

“ I felt guilty that my abusers might be punished for their actions, and I didn't want to cause any harm, even knowing that they had hurt me a lot. I have a nature that seeks to avoid hurting anyone, and I felt a lot of guilt.

Survivor of online abuse (Spanish-speaking)

**All survivors, in particular survivors of mixed and online abuse, reported shame as the strongest barrier to immediate disclosure.** 59% of mixed abuse survivors and 55% of online abuse survivors reported they had been too ashamed after the abuse to disclose it, compared to 50% of in-person abuse survivors. There were significant differences between the groups, as mixed abuse survivors were 26% more likely than in-person abuse survivors to report shame as a barrier to disclosure.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>19</sup> Overall model :  $\chi^2(3) = 135.14, p < .001$ , Nagelkerke  $R^2 = .01$ . B = .23,  $p < .001$ , CI = 1.12;1.42.

“ I felt ashamed of what happened, and even though I was the survivor, I felt guilty and disgusting.  
Survivor of mixed abuse (Czech-speaking)

“ I was afraid of being scolded or that people would say it was my fault.  
Survivor of online abuse (French-speaking)

“ I felt deep shame for feeling aroused and for “falling for it”.  
Survivor of mixed abuse (English-speaking)

“ I was afraid to speak because I had taken the pictures myself. It is still abuse.  
Survivor of online abuse (Norwegian-speaking)

“ I didn't want to tell them (my parents) something they might not believe, and I was very ashamed. When I was older, I was able to tell them, and it was traumatic.  
Survivor of online abuse (Spanish-speaking)

**Many survivors did not disclose because they thought the experience was not serious enough.** This barrier was reported by 45% of online abuse survivors, 38% of mixed abuse survivors, and 19% of in-person abuse survivors.

“ The perpetrators told me it was a joke and laughed about it, and generally among peers it was accepted that things like groping or sending pornography were “just jokes.” So, I thought I was simply overreacting and that it wasn't serious.  
Survivor of mixed abuse (Polish -speaking)

“ I did not know it was abuse; my perpetrators isolated me from all my friends.  
Survivor of online abuse (Polish-speaking)

**Survivors of abuse with an online element were statistically significantly more likely to think the abuse was not serious enough to disclose.** Online abuse survivors were 104% more likely<sup>20</sup> and mixed abuse survivors were 71% more likely<sup>21</sup> to report this barrier to disclosure, compared to in-person abuse survivors. The difference between online abuse and mixed abuse survivors was not statistically significant.

“ I was afraid I would ruin my cousin's life if someone actually took it seriously, and I didn't believe it was something serious.  
Survivor of mixed abuse (Polish -speaking)

“ At first, I didn't even realize it was something serious; only in high school did I understand, and then the trauma surfaced.  
Survivor of mixed abuse (Romanian-speaking)

“ I'm okay. It shows me that what I experienced was serious and not less serious than others.  
Survivor of online abuse (German-speaking)

<sup>20</sup> Overall model :  $\chi^2(3) = 1091.49, p < .001, \text{Nagelkerke } R^2 = .12. B = .71, p < .001, CI = 1.35; 3.10.$

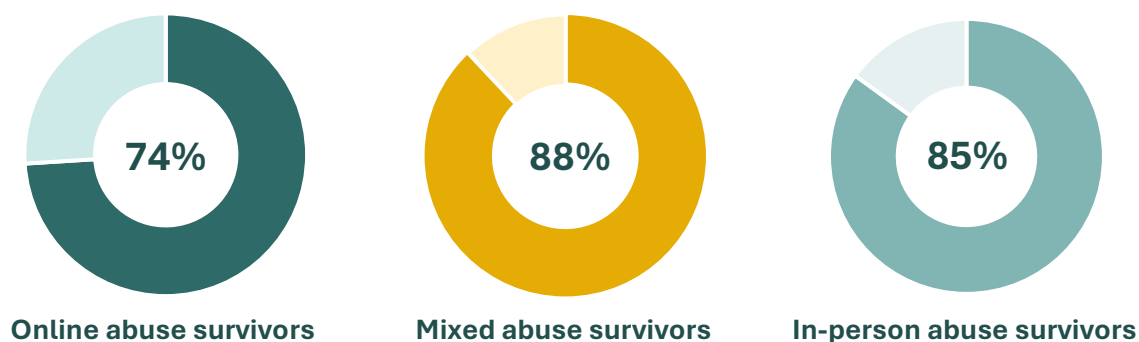
<sup>21</sup>  $B = .53, p < .001, CI = 1.50; 1.94.$

# 3. Long-Term Consequences

## Consequences

**Survivors of all abuse types reported enduring long-term consequences.** At least three in four survivors across groups reported that they had experienced long-term consequences as a result of the childhood sexual violence they had been subjected to. Long-term consequences were reported by 88% of mixed abuse survivors, 85% on in-person abuse survivors, and 74% of online abuse survivors.

**Figure 5: Long-term consequences endured by survivors**



I have daughters & they have grown up been kept from that side of the family - the risk was too high but sadly they have missed out on some benign family members too. I am heartbroken that my parents still socialise with him & his wife despite them knowing & believing what happened.

Survivor of online abuse (English-speaking)



Low trust in adults, fear that all adults want to take advantage of me.

Survivor of online abuse (Finnish-speaking)



At one point, I felt like everyone was looking at me and making fun of me. When I was around people, I tried not to move so as not to draw attention to myself. I often had a strange feeling on my back, it felt like it was being pressed. If I had to go somewhere, I walked at a fast pace. In my teens, I was very afraid of boys, now I sometimes feel uncomfortable in the presence of men, sometimes even fear creeps in.

Survivor of online abuse (Latvian-speaking)

## Types of Long-Term Consequences

**Survivors faced multiple long-term consequences, most commonly depression, anxiety, and relationship difficulties.** On average, mixed abuse survivors reported 6.3 different long-term consequences, compared to 4.7 among in-person abuse survivors and 5.3 among online abuse survivors. Across all three groups, the overall pattern of long-term consequences was broadly similar, with anxiety, depression, and relationship difficulties consistently among the

most commonly reported outcomes. This suggests that despite differences in abuse context, the types of long-term impacts reported are largely consistent across groups. However, no statistically significant differences were found between online and in-person abuse groups for most individual long-term consequences, suggesting similar patterns of reported symptoms across these two groups.

**Strong mental health impacts across all groups.** Mental health related consequences were the most commonly reported by all groups. Depression, anxiety, and self-harm were highly prevalent, with the highest levels seen in the mixed abuse group. This indicates that psychological distress is a central long-term outcome regardless of abuse type.

**Mixed abuse survivors reported the highest number of consequences.** This suggests a broader and more complex impact profile for individuals who experienced both online and contact based forms of abuse. The highest levels were observed for anxiety (68%), depression (67%), and relationship difficulties (64%), indicating that this group may experience a particularly wide range of psychological and relational impacts.

**Online abuse associated with psychological and sexual functioning impacts.** While online abuse survivors generally reported fewer long-term consequences compared to the other two groups, this group showed substantial levels of psychological consequences. Anxiety (60%) and depression (59 %) were highly prevalent, and sexual dysfunction was notably higher among online abuse survivors (50%) compared to in-person abuse survivors (39%). This suggests that even in the absence of contact abuse, online facilitated abuse is associated with significant long-term harm.



Difficulty completing sexual relationships with my partner, with anxiety and crying during the process, stopping the process, and preferring to stay only in foreplay with my partner.

Survivor of mixed abuse (Greek-speaking)



I developed hypersexualization as a result of the trauma. [...]. This affected my self-esteem throughout my development from preadolescence onward. I felt disgust toward my body, felt that it had no value, and that it only existed to please others.

Survivor of mixed abuse (Spanish-speaking)



Due to a feeling of lack of self-worth, or feeling of worth only through sexual relationships.

Survivor of online abuse (Greek-speaking)

**Relational and social impacts are consistently high across groups.** Across all groups, difficulties in forming and maintaining personal relationships were among the most commonly reported consequences, particularly among mixed abuse survivors (64%) and in-person abuse survivors (54%). Social challenges were also consistently reported across groups, highlighting the broader interpersonal consequences of abuse beyond mental health symptoms.



I have previously been in an abusive relationship. I am now in a stable relationship, which has been very challenging for me.

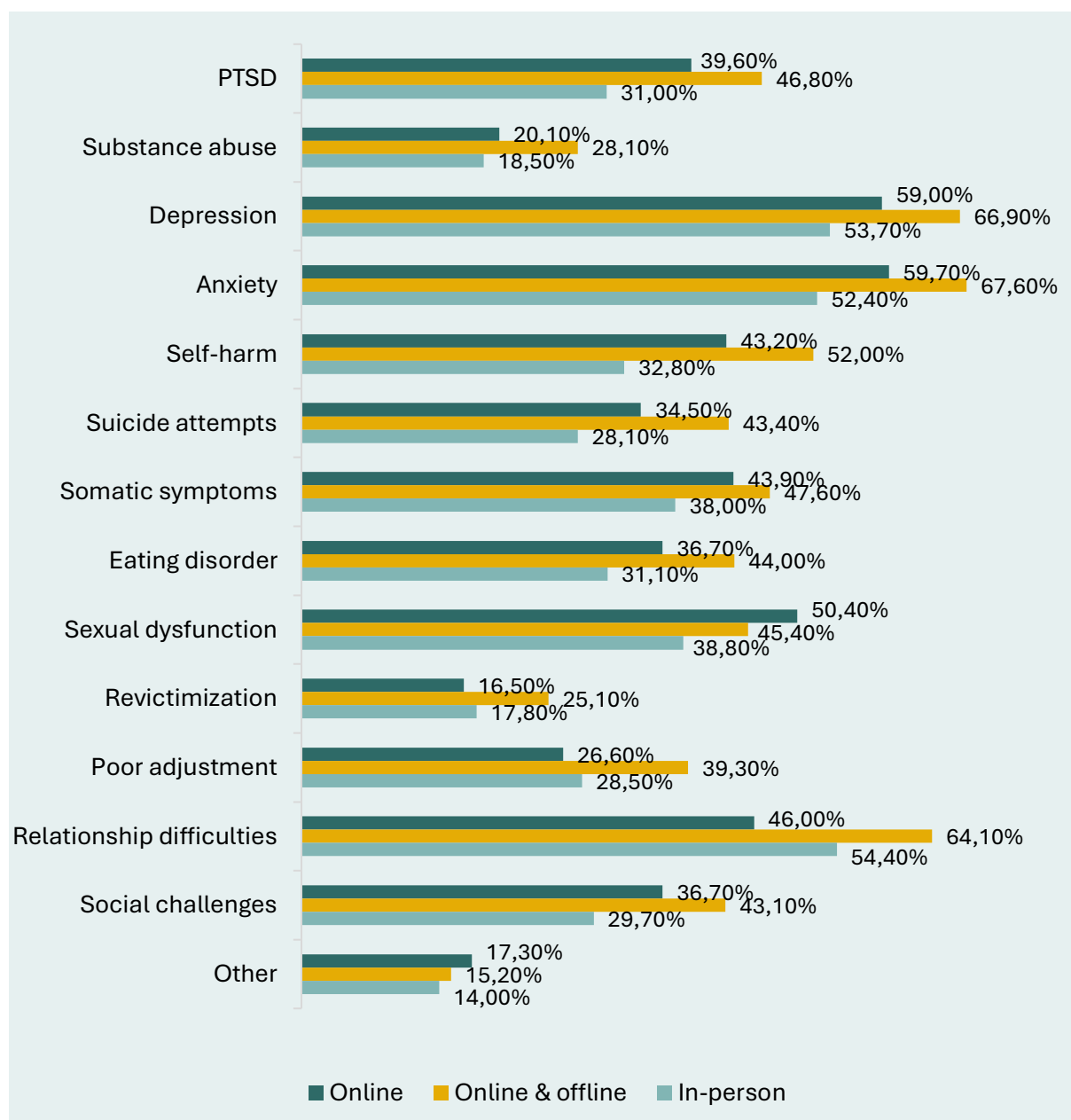
Survivor of online abuse (Finnish-speaking)

“ Only after finishing 10 years of psychotherapy was I able to have friends; before that I was always alone. I am 35; from age 20 to 30 I was in therapy.  
Survivor of online abuse (Spanish-speaking)

“ It was like discovering the internet while at the same time becoming prey to adults and teenagers who repeatedly sent all kinds of messages, images, and audio recordings. It became overwhelming – I don’t know how to explain it – but I always felt disgusted, and in the end, I avoided having any kind of social media.  
Survivor of mixed abuse (Spanish-speaking)

“ I have previously been in an abusive relationship. I am now in a stable relationship, which has been very challenging for me.  
Survivor of online abuse (Finnish-speaking)

**Figure 6: Types of long-term consequences**

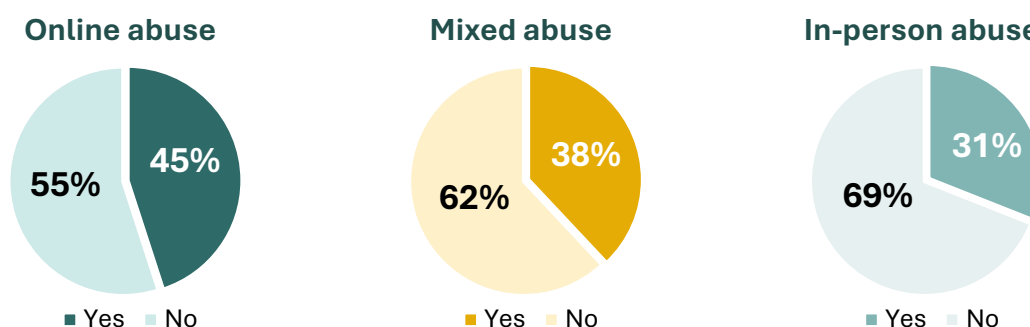


# 4. Support

## Access to Support

**More than half of survivors did not receive any support after disclosing.** Survivors across all groups who disclosed their experienced reported that they received no support or help after disclosing.

**Figure 7: Disclosure led to receiving support or help**



They did not support me or help me. They don't believe me.  
Survivor of online abuse (Spanish-speaking)

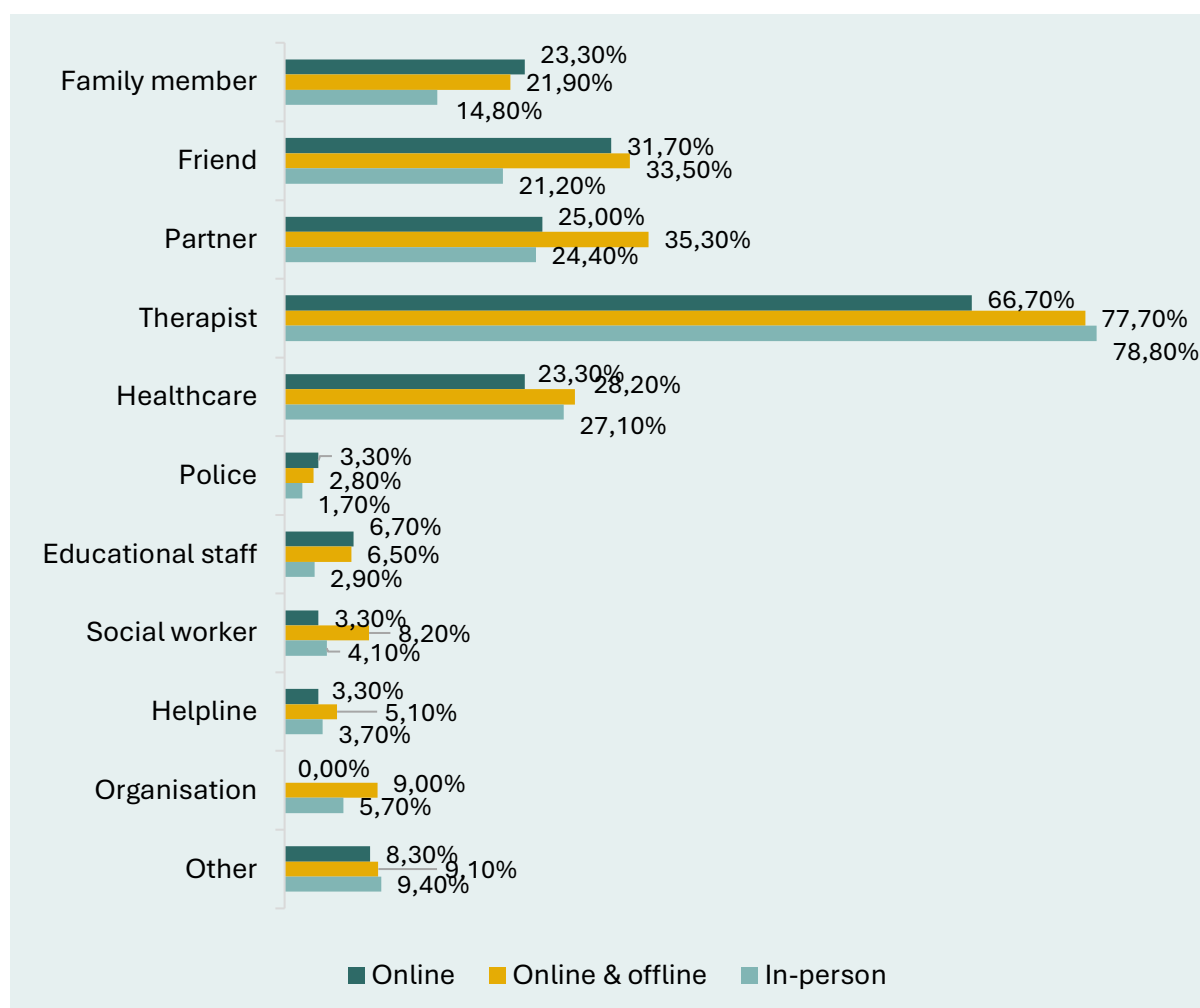


I only received help when I independently started psychotherapy and paid a lawyer who advised me on what to do.  
Survivor of online abuse (Croatian-speaking)

**Online abuse survivors were the most likely to receive support.** 45% of online abuse survivors received support or help after disclosing, compared to 38% of mixed abuse survivors, and 31% of in-person abuse survivors.

Within the online abuse group, support to cope with was more often provided by a friend or family member, while support from most professional sources such as police, social workers, and educational staff was relatively low. Therapist support was the most commonly reported source of support across the three groups.

**Figure 8: Support source to cope with long-term consequences**



**Online abuse survivors’ disclosure was most likely to lead to a police investigation.** Of the groups, the survivors of online abuse were most likely to report that their disclosure led to a police investigation (24%), followed by mixed abuse survivors (17%) and, lastly, in-person abuse survivors (11%).

**Disclosure leading to prosecution or sentencing most common among in-person abuse survivors.** In-person abuse survivors were most likely to report that their disclosure led to a prosecution or sentence (48%), followed by online abuse survivors (46%) and mixed abuse survivors (46%). However, mixed abuse survivors were more likely to receive compensation (46%), followed by online abuse survivors (36%), compared to in-person abuse survivors (28%).

“ In the end, telling someone did not help at all, and because of inadequate child protection supervision, the abuse continued even after.  
Survivor of mixed abuse (Finnish-speaking)

“ The grooming case was taken to the police, but I don’t remember receiving any counselling support.  
Survivor of online abuse (Finnish-speaking)



## Discussion

The findings highlight important differences in the experiences of survivors of online, mixed, and in-person abuse. Together, they underscore the need to recognise online child sexual abuse and exploitation as a distinct and significant form of harm, with important implications for prevention, support services, and clinical practice.

### Rethinking “stranger danger” in online environments

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Most online abuse survivors knew the perpetrator before the abuse began. This challenges the common belief that online abuse is primarily perpetrated by strangers. Although the largest proportion of survivors of online abuse reported meeting their abuser online, a substantial number indicated that they knew the perpetrator through existing social circles or shared household environments, further challenging the “stranger danger” narrative often associated with online abuse. Framing online perpetrators primarily as unknown strangers may therefore be misleading, as many offenders appear to exploit pre-existing social or familial relationships through digital platforms. It is also important to consider that as online environments are a common space for children and young people to spend time with peers, they may perceive friends met online in a similar way to those they know offline. This perspective may differ from that of adults, who are more likely to view online contacts as strangers when no offline meeting has taken place.



My friend at the time introduced us through an online roleplaying site.  
Survivor of online abuse (Polish-speaking)



I met them through online games, Instagram, etc.  
Survivor of online abuse (Spanish-speaking)



The perpetrator was my mother's boyfriend, who lived with us for a while.  
Survivor of online abuse (Czech-speaking)

### Online childhood sexual violence increases shame

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Our findings indicate that shame was more pronounced among survivors whose abuse involved an online element, including both the online abuse group and the mixed abuse group, compared to survivors who experienced in-person abuse only. This aligns with emerging

research indicating that online abuse and the ongoing possibility of abuse material circulating online can intensify feelings of shame, fear, and loss of control.<sup>22</sup>

“ I don’t trust and hold shame and blame as it was my fault even to date.  
Survivor of mixed abuse (English-speaking)

“ Even though the shared videos are not very clear, my daughter, who was 13 at the time of the abuse, considers the videos being shared to be a worse than the abuse itself.  
Parent of a victim of online abuse

In cases where physical intimidation is absent, perpetrators rely more heavily on manipulation, coercion and emotional abuse, which can make it more difficult for survivors to recognise the abuse. As a result, survivors may internalise victim-blaming attitudes and feel responsible for engaging with the perpetrator, despite the coercive dynamics involved.<sup>23</sup>

These dynamics may also be unintentionally reinforced by responses from others around the survivor, including parents and professionals. Questions such as “Why did you go back to the platform?”, “Why didn’t you just block the perpetrator?”, or “Why didn’t you switch off your phone?”, can imply responsibility on the part of the victim and contribute to increased guilt and shame.

“ I was blamed for it by the people around me, including family.  
Survivor of online abuse (English-speaking)

“ I wasn’t affected physically, but I held a lot of shame for this one phone call that was not my fault and completely out of my control.  
Survivor of online abuse (English-speaking)

“ I felt it was my fault that it happened.  
Survivor of online abuse (Norwegian-speaking)

Shame was the most reported barrier to disclosure among all survivors, indicating that increased shame among online abuse survivors may contribute to the lower disclosure rates, limiting the ability to access support and justice.

“ I blamed myself for years for not defending myself or speaking up. I also felt it was my fault.  
Survivor of mixed abuse (Spanish-speaking)

## Online child sexual violence is not taken seriously

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Survivors of abuse with an online element were statistically significantly more likely to think the abuse was not serious enough to disclose. This is consistent with previous research suggesting that online sexual abuse may be more difficult for victims to recognise as abuse when there is

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<sup>22</sup> Hamilton-Giachritsis, C., Hanson, E., Whittle, H., & Beech, A. (2017). “Everyone deserves to be happy and safe”: A mixed methods study exploring how online and offline child sexual abuse impact young people and how professionals respond to it. NSPCC. <https://learning.nspcc.org.uk/media/1123/impact-online-offline-child-sexual-abuse.pdf>

<sup>23</sup> Hamilton-Giachritsis, C., Hanson, E., Whittle, H., & Beech, A. (2017). “Everyone deserves to be happy and safe”: A mixed methods study exploring how online and offline child sexual abuse impact young people and how professionals respond to it. NSPCC. <https://learning.nspcc.org.uk/media/1123/impact-online-offline-child-sexual-abuse.pdf>

no physical or offline element.<sup>24</sup> This may also reflect broader societal attitudes that continue to minimise or misunderstand online sexual abuse, particularly in cases where there is no physical contact or where communication appeared “voluntary” on the surface. Recent research on technology-assisted sexual abuse suggests that victims often struggle to recognise their experiences as abuse due to grooming, manipulation, normalisation of online sexual interactions, and feelings of self-blame.<sup>25</sup> As a consequence, survivors of online abuse may be less likely to disclose their experiences, which may impede access to support and protective interventions, thereby increasing the likelihood that abuse remains undetected and continues over time.



Everyone knew, but no one wanted to get involved. When I went to therapy, I was finally able to talk about it. They always treated me like I was difficult, and I started saying that my life was a torment. How else could it be?

Survivor of online abuse (Spanish-speaking)



Now that we have lawyers the police are taking us seriously, but previously I spent years trying to get help.

Parent of a victim of online abuse (through the so-called ‘The Com’/‘764’ online networks)

## Online child sexual abuse and exploitation causes significant long-term negative consequences

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Survivors of mixed abuse reported the greatest number of long-term negative consequences compared to survivors of online or in-person abuse only. This may reflect the cumulative and overlapping nature of victimisation across contexts. Research on polyvictimisation suggests that exposure to multiple forms of abuse is associated with more severe psychological outcomes, including anxiety, depression, shame, hypervigilance, and difficulties with trust and relationships.<sup>26</sup> Experiences that move between online and offline environments can create a more pervasive sense of entrapment, including both physical settings and digital environments that remain constantly accessible. The online component may also prolong the traumatic experience through the ongoing fear that images or other abusive material could continue circulating, even after the abuse itself has ended.



Fear that everyone has bad intentions and isolation.

Survivor of online abuse (Croatian -speaking)

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<sup>24</sup> Quayle, E. & Sinclair, R. (2012). An introduction to the problem. In Quayle & Ribisl (Eds.), *Understanding and Preventing Online Sexual Exploitation of Children*. Routledge.

<sup>25</sup> McGinn, T., Chereni, A., & McGinnis, E. (2026). A systematic review of the perceived barriers to and facilitators of technology-assisted child sexual abuse disclosure. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 172, 107869. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chiabu.2025.107869>

<sup>26</sup> Ford, J. D., Elhai, J. D., Connor, D. F., & Frueh, B. C. (2010). Poly-victimization and risk of posttraumatic, depressive, and substance use disorders and involvement in delinquency in a national sample of adolescents. *Journal of Adolescent Health*, 46(6), 545–552. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jadohealth.2009.11.212>; Lee, N., Pigott, T. D., Watson, A., Reuben, K., O’Hara, K., Massetti, G., Fang, X., & Self-Brown, S. (2023). Childhood polyvictimization and associated health outcomes: A systematic scoping review. *Trauma, Violence, & Abuse*, 24(3), 1579–1592. <https://doi.org/10.1177/15248380211073847>.

“ I quickly get triggered and stay on alert. I also feel uncomfortable knowing I’ve done a lot online in front of many people, that videos have been shared, and not knowing who has seen them.  
Survivor of mixed abuse (English -speaking)

“ Sharp chest pain that my psychologist said was anxiety; every time I wanted to leave my house I had severe headaches, diagnosed with depression, PTSD, generalized anxiety, and mild social anxiety.  
Survivor of mixed abuse (Spanish -speaking)

“ Very unstable sleep habits; I could spend days awake contacting strangers online for sexual purposes or masturbating; later I switched to extreme perfectionism and overwork with very little sleep.  
Survivor of mixed abuse (Spanish-speaking)

Survivors of online abuse appear to experience similar patterns of trauma-related symptoms than those of in-person abuse. These findings are particularly important considering persistent societal attitudes that tend to minimise online abuse or perceive it as less “real” or less harmful than offline victimisation.

“ I've never been able to have a relationship.  
Survivor of online abuse (Portuguese -speaking)

“ It has caused a lot of challenges, isolation, a smaller circle of friends, difficulties in attending school, and challenges in participating in the school's community events.  
Parent of a victim of online abuse

All survivors reported high levels of difficulties in forming and maintaining relationships. Such difficulties may reflect trauma-related “latent vulnerability”, whereby early adverse experiences contribute to longer-term vulnerability in social functioning and mental health across the life course.<sup>27</sup> These trauma-related processes may contribute to “social thinning”, characterised by weakening social relationships and support networks over time.

Notably, survivors in the online abuse group reported sexual dysfunction more frequently than those in the other groups, with the mixed group falling in the middle. This suggests that online sexual victimisation may have specific and enduring impacts on sexual functioning. Child sexual abuse is well established in the literature as a risk factor for later sexual dysfunction.<sup>28</sup> However, the specific relationship between online child sexual abuse and later sexual dysfunction requires further research, given the lack of evidence in this area.

“ I am unable to orgasm on my own. I freeze when I try, even with toys. I need a partner to help me reach orgasm...  
Survivor of online abuse (Norwegian -speaking)

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<sup>27</sup> McCrory, E. J., & Viding, E. (2015). The theory of latent vulnerability: Reconceptualizing the link between childhood maltreatment and psychiatric disorder. *Development and Psychopathology*, 27(2), 493–505. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0954579415000115>

<sup>28</sup> Pulverman, C. S., Kilimnik, C. D., & Meston, C. M. (2018). The impact of childhood sexual abuse on women's sexual health: A comprehensive review. *Sexual Medicine Reviews*, 6(2), 188–200. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sxmr.2017.12.002>



I do not know if it is dysfunction, but during sex I do not experience much pleasure and have never achieved vaginal orgasm. Mentally I want sexual relations, but physically I do not. I cannot explain it. Maybe it is related to childhood trauma. I have been married for 16 years and our sexual relationship is not good.

Survivor of mixed abuse (Latvian-speaking)

## Online spaces create more opportunities for sexual abuse and exploitation

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Survivors of technology-facilitated abuse, including both online abuse and mixed abuse survivors, were much more likely to report being asked or pressured to do something sexual without it leading to further acts, indicating that digital spaces make it easier for offenders to test boundaries, initiate grooming behaviours, and target children with minimal effort or risk. The accessibility and anonymity of online platforms may lower the barrier for offenders to attempt exploitation. On the other hand, this may indicate that children are more able to block or disengage from lower-level harassment before it escalates into more serious forms of abuse in online environments. In either case, the findings highlight the urgent need for stronger protections for children in digital environments.



From around ages 10-14, I was heavily involved in grooming relationships on social media. For example, I was an “online sex slave”, in a “relationship”, or a “friends with benefits” arrangement. This ranged from exchanging pictures over Snapchat, Instagram, or WhatsApp to long-term ‘relationships of every kind’ on those platforms. Altogether, it was probably hundreds of men between 18 and 50 years old.

Survivor of mixed abuse (German -speaking)

The higher rates of trafficking and commercial sexual exploitation reported by online abuse survivors suggest that digital environments play a significant role in facilitating exploitative child sexual abuse. Online platforms enable perpetrators to recruit, coerce, and financially exploit victims more easily and anonymously than in offline settings. The accessibility of digital technologies may increase opportunities for organised exploitation, highlighting the need for targeted prevention, safeguarding, and clinical responses that specifically address technology-facilitated forms of abuse.



I was controlled in human trafficking via mobile phones. Perpetrators posted ads on sex/escort sites (when I was a minor), and buyers contacted me via phones with instructions on where I had to go to be abused. If I avoided it, didn't show up, or didn't answer my phone, I was stalked and subjected to extremely severe violence by traffickers. I was sold to perpetrators who filmed the abuse. They also took photos. The material was uploaded online as “porn”.

Survivor of mixed abuse (Swedish -speaking)

## Victims of online childhood sexual violence are more likely to get support

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Survivors whose abuse involved an online element, including those in the online and mixed abuse groups, were more likely to have received support than survivors of exclusively offline abuse. They were more likely to identify a family member or friend as a source of support, but less likely to report receiving support from a therapist or healthcare professional compared to offline abuse group. This finding is consistent with recent research suggesting that professionals often feel insufficiently equipped to support victims of online sexual abuse.<sup>29</sup> The greater likelihood of receiving support from family members and friends among survivors of online abuse may partly be explained by the fact that victims of online childhood sexual abuse were, on average, slightly older at the time of the abuse. This may have enhanced their developmental capacity to recognise abuse and disclose it to others.

The finding that disclosure by survivors of online abuse was most likely to result in a police investigation may reflect the availability of digital evidence, which can facilitate the initiation of investigations and subsequent criminal proceedings.



Support and understanding from my family.  
Survivor of mixed abuse (Portuguese -speaking)



[Someone helped me] To receive the psychological help I needed.  
Survivor of mixed abuse (Spanish -speaking)



[Someone helped me] To resolve some of my emotional instability.  
Survivor of mixed abuse (Italian -speaking)

## Online and offline abuse are often interconnected

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The mixed group included survivors who had experienced both technology-facilitated and in-person abuse. They reported the highest number of negative long-term consequences and were even more likely than the other two groups to identify shame as a barrier to disclosure. This group also reported experiencing the most different long-term consequences, suggesting that the abuse that takes places across multiple contexts may lead to more complex and cumulative harm.

The mixed abuse group may include survivors whose abuse transitioned between online and offline contexts, survivors whose abuse involved overlapping online and offline elements that cannot be meaningfully separated, and survivors who experienced distinct instances of both online and offline abuse or exploitation. In this group, online grooming may have led to in-person abuse, or offline abuse may have continued through online abuse after physical contact

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<sup>29</sup> World Childhood Foundation. (2025). Gaps in the system: Practitioners' experiences supporting children subjected to online sexual abuse. World Childhood Foundation. <https://childhood.se/wp-content/uploads/2025/06/childhood-report-gaps-in-the-system-1.pdf>

ends. In the latter, technology-facilitated abuse may be better understood as an extension of existing abusive dynamics rather than a separate phenomenon.

It is important to acknowledge that child sexual abuse increasingly occurs across multiple settings, with digital technologies becoming embedded in everyday relationships and interactions. For many survivors, the abuse may be experienced as a single continuum rather than as distinct online and offline events. As digital technologies become increasingly integrated into daily life, the boundaries between these environments become less meaningful. Future studies may benefit from exploring the relationship between online and offline elements rather than treating them as mutually exclusive elements of child sexual abuse.



I can't go out on the street, not even to the shop in my neighbourhood, I always feel watched, as if something bad is going to happen, I'm afraid to live.

Survivor of mixed abuse (Spanish -speaking)



I have to remain anonymous online and in life.

Survivor of mixed abuse (Finnish -speaking)



I have not been able to make friends with anyone; I have difficulty trusting people. I withdrew from my old friends, so I practically have no social life except for one online friend.

Survivor of mixed abuse (Finnish-speaking)



## Conclusion

Online child sexual abuse and exploitation is taking increasingly severe and complex forms as technology continues to evolve. Despite this, it remains as a form of abuse that is often minimised, not fully understood, or perceived as less harmful than abuse that occurs in-person.

This report provides a comprehensive analysis of the experiences of 24,912 victims and survivors of childhood sexual violence, and the impacts of online and technology-facilitated child sexual abuse and exploitation. By examining the experiences of survivors of online abuse, in-person abuse, and mixed abuse, the report provides important findings regarding victimisation, disclosure, long-term consequences, and access to support and justice.

The findings challenge the common misconception that online abuse is perpetrated by strangers. Many survivors reported that the perpetrator was someone they knew before the abuse began, including individuals from their family or circle of trust. Survivors of online abuse were also more likely to report multiple perpetrators and experiences linked to trafficking or commercial sexual exploitation, underscoring the complexity of technology-facilitated abuse.

Moreover, the results also challenge assumptions that online child sexual abuse and exploitation is less serious than in-person abuse. Survivors of online abuse reported serious and long-lasting impacts, including trauma-related consequences comparable to those reported by survivors of in-person abuse. At the same time, survivors who experienced both online and in-person abuse consistently reported highest levels of victimisation and negative long-term consequences, highlighting the increased harms associated with abuse that take place in multiple contexts.

Despite the severe and lasting negative impacts that survivors of online groups reported, survivors in these groups were more likely to report that they had not disclosed the abuse they had been subjected to because they did not think the abuse was serious enough. This highlights the need to continue raising awareness about online child sexual abuse and exploitation and improve how this form of abuse is perceived among children, families, and professionals.

In conclusion, the findings demonstrate that online and technology-facilitated sexual violence against children is not a less serious form of abuse. It can result in devastating and long-lasting impacts on victims' and survivors' lives and wellbeing, and also present unique challenges in relation to recognition, disclosure, support, and reparation. Improving the understanding of online abuse is essential to effectively preventing harm and ensuring that support and justice systems reflect the realities reported by survivors.



*The person forced me with words to  
take off my clothes.*

- Polish-speaking survivor of online abuse.



### **About Protect Children**

Protect Children is a non-governmental child-rights organization based in Finland, working globally to end all forms of sexual violence against children. We adopt a holistic, research-based approach to address the issue from multiple angles.

Learn more about Protect Children: [protectchildren.fi](https://protectchildren.fi)

### **About the Justice Initiative**

The Justice Initiative is a European initiative aiming to restore justice for past victims of abuse across Europe and strengthen child protection for future generations. Protect Children, the leader of the Justice Initiative Nordic Hub, developed the Global Our Voice Survivor Survey with support from the Justice Initiative.

Learn more about the Justice Initiative: [justice-initiative.eu](https://justice-initiative.eu)

### **About the International Policing and Public Protection Research Institute (IPPPRI)**

The International Policing and Public Protection Research Institute (IPPPRI) is part of Anglia Ruskin University. Its vision is to use applied research to support the global response to exploitation and abuse in all its forms. IPPPRI's team of researchers are committed to delivering world-leading research innovation with international impact. Its work focuses on a range of pressing public protection issues including online child sexual abuse, workforce wellbeing, extremism and counter-terrorism, and victim-survivor advocacy and support.

Learn more about IPPPRI: <https://www.aru.ac.uk/international-policing-and-public-protection-research-institute>

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