CHILDLIGHT
Global Child Safety Institute

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CHILDLIGHT ANNUAL FLAGSHIP REPORT

TECHNICAL NOTES

Project C

Nature of Online Child Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (CSEA)

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Technical Note

This scoping review focused on 82 studies. In order to create a comprehensive search strategy, we conducted a series of preliminary searches on several academic databases accessed through EBSCOhost. This initial exploration helped refine our search strategy regarding the relevant terms associated with the prevalence and nature of OCSEA. An extensive search through academic and grey literature, as well as online published reports of specialized organizations, utilized systematic queries was conducted.

This process involved the use of four distinct sets of term, related to:

Age group (e.g., "children", "minors", "teens")
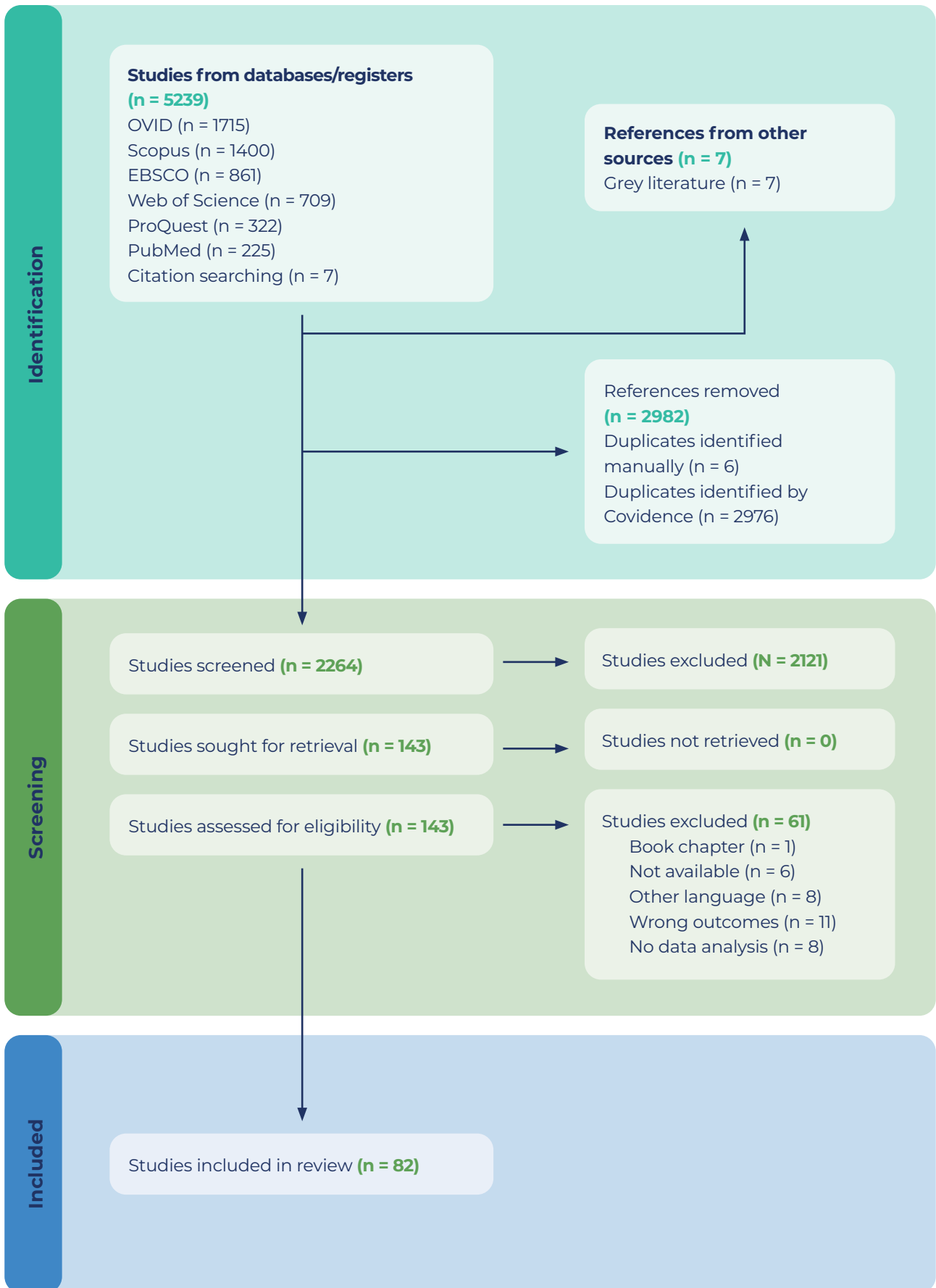
Offense type (e.g., "CSEA", "grooming", "CSAM")

Magnitude and measurement (e.g., "percentage", "rate", "incidence", "prevalence")

Digital networks (e.g., "ESP", "electronic service provider", "P2P", "dark net", "darkweb", "tor", "I2P")

Given the potentially exclusionary nature of certain combinations of search terms within a query, Boolean logic was used – combining AND OR operators – to ensure a more inclusive and comprehensive search.

The relevant sources were compiled in Covidence and subjected to Title and Abstract screening, Full-Text screening and Data Extraction. See below for the PRISMA flow diagram found in Table I.

Prisma Flow Diagram of Scoping Review

Identification

Studies from databases/registers (n = 5239)
OVID (n = 1715)
Scopus (n = 1400)
EBSCO (n = 861)
Web of Science (n = 709)
ProQuest (n = 322)
PubMed (n = 225)
Citation searching (n = 7)

References from other sources (n = 7)
Grey literature (n = 7)

References removed (n = 2982)
Duplicates identified manually (n = 6)
Duplicates identified by Covidence (n = 2976)

Screening

Studies screened **(n = 2264)** → Studies excluded **(N = 2121)**

Studies sought for retrieval **(n = 143)** → Studies not retrieved **(n = 0)**

Studies assessed for eligibility **(n = 143)** → Studies excluded **(n = 61)**
Book chapter (n = 1)
Not available (n = 6)
Other language (n = 8)
Wrong outcomes (n = 11)
No data analysis (n = 8)

Included

Studies included in review **(n = 82)**

A total of 75 number of studies were included and seven documents obtained from Non-Governmental Organizations and Research Institutes for a total of 82 studies, of these:

- 41 focused on various types sexual harms to children online (Alderson et al., 2021; Augusti et al., 2021; Baker, 2022; Bergen et al., 2014; Calvete, 2022; Canders et al., 2013; Copp et al., 2013; Dahlqvist et al., 2018, 2022; de Santisteban & Gamez-Guadix, 2017, 2018; Diaz-Aguado & Martinez-Arias, 2022; Finkelhor et al., 2022, 2023, 2023; Gamez-Guadix et al., 2018; Garrington et al, 2017; Gilbert et al., 2023; Greene-Colozzi et al., 2020; Guerra et al., 2021; Kerstens & Sol, 2014; Kolodner, 2021; Longobardi et al., 2021; Madigan et al., 2018; Mitchell et al., 2013, 2014; Moore et al 2020; Noll et al 2022; Ortega-Baron et al., 2022; Pederson et al., 2023; Rowse et al., 2022; Say et al., 2015; Schulz et al., 2016; Sklenarova et al., 2018; Tintori et al., 2023; Uytun et al., 2019; Vale et al., 2018; Villacampa & Gomez, 2017; Widuger 2016; Zelviene et al., 2020; Zweig et al., 2013),

- 17 focused on child sexual abuse material file sharing networks (Bissias et al., 2015; Bursztein et al., 2019; Cubitt et al., 2021; Elliot et al., 2019; Faust et al., 2015; Hernandez et al., 2018; Hurley et al., 2013; Jung et al., 2012; Levine et al., 2017, 2023; Owens et al., 2016; Phelan, 2022; Schuler et al., 2021; Smid et al., 2014; Steel et al., 2021; Van der Bruggen & Blokland, 2022; Van der Bruggen et al., 2022) and

- 12 focused on 'sexting' and 'sexual extortion' (Alsoubai et al., 2022; Calvete et al., 2021, 2023; Ceron et al., 2018; Foody et al., 2021; de Santisteban & Gamez-Guadix, 2017; Gamez-Guadiz & Incera, 2021; Gamez-Guadiz et al., 2022; Machimbarrena et al., 2018; Patchin & Hinduja, 2018; Van Ouytsel et al., 2021; Wolak et al., 2018).

More studies focused on victimisation rather than on perpetration with the breakdown as follows:

- 52 of the documents focused on data stemming from victims/students (Augusti et al., 2021; Alderson et al., 2021; Alsoubai et al., 2022; Calvete, 2022; Calvete et al., 2021, 2023; Canders et al., 2013; Copp et al., 2013; Ceron et al., 2018; Dahlqvist et al., 2018, 2022; Diaz-Aguado & Martinez-Arias, 2022; ECPAC, Interpol, 2018; -; Finkelhor et al., 2022, 2023, 2023; Foody et al., 2021; Gamez-Guadix et al., 2018; Gamez-Guadix & Incera., 2021, Gamez-Guadix, 2022; Gandolfi et al., 2021; Gewirtz-Meydan et al., 2019; Gilbert et al., 2023; Greene-Colozzi et al., 2020; Guerra et al., 2021; Hurley et al., 2013; INHOPE, 2022; IWF, 2022; Kerstens & Sol, 2014; Kolodner 2021; Longobardi et al., 2021; Machimbarrena et al., 2018; Madigan et al., 2018; Madigan et al., 2018; Mitchell et al., 2013, 2014; Moore et al 2020; Noll et al 2022; Ortega-Baron et al., 2022; Patchin & Hinduja, 2018; Pederson, et al., 2023 Rowse et al., 2022; Say et al., 2015; Sklenarova et al., 2018; Tintori et al., 2023; Uytun et al., 2019; Van Ouytsel et al., 2021; Villacampa & Gomez 2017; WeProtect Global Alliance, 2021, 2023; Widuger, 2016; Wolak et al., 2018; Zelviene et al., 2020).

- while 18 focused solely on perpetrator data (Bergen et al., 2014; Canadian Centre for Child Protection, 2021; Cubitt et al., 2022; Elliot et al., 2019; Faust et al., 2015; Garrington et al., 2017; Hernandez et al., 2018; Jung et al., 2012; Lamade, 2014; Kolodner, 2021; Owens et al., 2016; Phelan, 2022; Schuler et al., 2021; Schulz et al., 2016; Smid et al., 2014; Steel et al., 2021; Vale et al., 2018; Van der Bruggen & Blokland, 2022; Van der Bruggen et al., 2022;).

- In addition, three studies looked at both victimisation and perpetration (Canders et al., 2013; Vale et al., 2018; Zweig et al., 2018)

Strengths and Limitations

Limitations of this study include the search only being conducted in English, which may miss important non-English studies and the search for studies was from 15 June 2013 – 15 June 2023 which may preclude the most recently published studies. Therefore, it is impossible to tell if the top harms identified are simply those most studied or represent the top harms universally. However, the agreement between studies of various methodological approaches limits this potential bias. Additionally, we mainly focused on the empirical studies and reports providing primary and secondary quantitative data and analysis on the topic. Future studies might also investigate qualitative research on child sexual abuse and exploitation for a better understanding of individual and contextual factors contributing to online victimisation. The review focussed on the perspectives of victims, survivors and perpetrators and may have missed studies which involved data from parents/guardians, care-providers and front-line workers. This review also did not include research investigating psychometric properties of measures used for examining the online child sexual abuse and exploitation, which could provide more insight into the dynamics of children and the online environment.

Despite these limitations, this scoping review provided a comprehensive synthesis of a variety of available quantitative data sources, including published peer-reviewed studies, grey literature and online published digital network monitoring reports and statistics. We used several academic search platforms and databases, as well as conducted hand searches of references of prior reviews and eligible studies, and expert recommendations, to ensure as far as possible that all relevant data sources are included. Moreover, the scope of this review was not restricted by the type of research context or specific OCSEA characteristics, which allowed us to appraise a diverse range of OCEA typologies and summarise evidence from both victim- and perpetrator-centric investigations.

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