

## ONLINE CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE – SOCIAL ISSUES

**NEWS:** A pilot study on online sexual exploitation and abuse of children in Karnataka has recommended that digital literacy and online safety should be a compulsory part of the school curriculum, starting from the primary level.

### WHAT'S IN THE NEWS?

#### Definition and Context

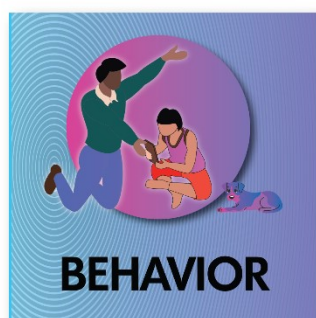
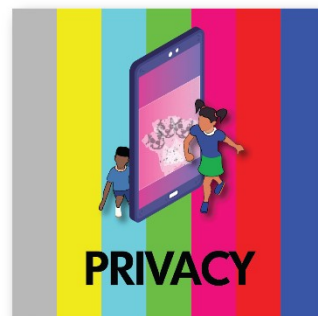
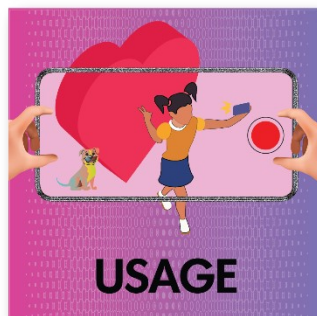
- **Online Child Sexual Abuse (OCSA):**  
Refers to any form of sexual exploitation or abuse of children that occurs via digital platforms such as social media, messaging apps, video-sharing platforms, and online gaming forums.
- **Common Digital Platforms Involved:**  
Abuse often takes place through commonly used digital spaces such as Instagram, WhatsApp, Facebook, Snapchat, YouTube, Telegram, and gaming platforms like PUBG, Free Fire, etc.

#### About Digital Literacy

- **Meaning of Digital Literacy:**  
Digital literacy is the capability to **access, understand, analyze, create, and communicate information** through digital technologies, ensuring safe and effective online engagement.
- **Key Components:**  
It includes a mix of cognitive (thinking), technical (tool usage), and social (communication and behavior) skills vital in today's digital environment.

#### Forms of Online Child Sexual Abuse (OCSA)

- **Online Grooming:**  
Perpetrators build an emotional connection with children online to gain their trust and manipulate them into exploitative situations.
- **Sexual Extortion (Sextortion):**  
Involves blackmailing children by threatening to expose sensitive images or videos unless further content is sent or specific demands are fulfilled.
- **Creation and Circulation of CSAM:**  
Refers to the production, possession, and dissemination of **Child Sexual Abuse Material (CSAM)**, which is a severe violation of child rights and digital laws.
- **Cyberstalking and Harassment:**  
Includes repeated unwanted online attention, unsolicited sexual messages, or inappropriate contact by strangers or known individuals.



## Objectives of the Study

- **Nature and Prevalence Analysis:**  
To examine how widespread and in what forms online sexual exploitation and abuse of children (OSEAC) occur in Karnataka.
- **Target Age Group:**  
Focused on children aged **8 to 18 years**, representing both **urban and rural settings** for comprehensive insights.
- **Stakeholder Engagement:**  
Gathered perspectives from **children, parents, teachers, and child protection professionals** to ensure a holistic understanding.

## Key Findings of the Study

- **Impact of COVID-19 Pandemic:**  
With increased online learning and digital access during lockdowns, children's exposure to online risks rose significantly.
- **Underreporting and Social Stigma:**  
Many cases go unreported due to **fear of blame, shame, or cultural taboos**, especially in conservative or rural societies.

- **High Risk Due to Lack of Awareness:**  
Children, parents, and teachers often lack adequate knowledge and **digital literacy**, making children more vulnerable to online threats.
- **Limited Supervision:**  
Many children access the internet unsupervised, especially in households where both parents work or digital tools are shared among many users.

## Major Recommendations

### 1. Digital Literacy and Curriculum Reform

- **Integrate Digital Safety in Schools:**  
Make **digital literacy and online safety** part of school curriculum from the **primary level onward**, using interactive and relatable formats.
- **Age-Appropriate Learning Tools:**  
Develop **toolkits and modules** tailored for different age groups to teach digital rights, responsibilities, and safe behavior online.

### 2. Teacher and Parental Involvement

- **Teacher Training:**  
Equip teachers with the skills to **identify early warning signs** of online abuse and provide proper guidance and support to children.
- **Parental Education:**  
Conduct **peer-led awareness sessions** for parents, particularly in rural or underprivileged areas, about safe online practices.
- **Promote Family Dialogue:**  
Encourage **open, non-judgmental conversations** between children and caregivers on online behavior, privacy, and digital ethics.

### 3. Community-Based Interventions

- **Local Awareness Campaigns:**  
Launch community-level programmes to **educate and engage** families, youth groups, and local leaders on the dangers of OCSA.
- **Digital Safety Champions:**  
Identify and train **youth volunteers or community leaders** to act as first responders and advocates for online safety.

- **Children as Stakeholders:**  
Involve children directly in **co-creating safer digital environments**, empowering them to voice their concerns and propose solutions.

#### 4. Institutional and Legal Measures

- **State Task Force on OSEAC:**  
Set up a dedicated **Karnataka OSEAC Task Force** for coordinated action across prevention, victim support, and rehabilitation.
- **Strengthen Multi-Stakeholder Partnerships:**  
Enhance collaboration between **schools, parents, NGOs, child welfare bodies, and law enforcement agencies** to create an integrated support system.
- **Enhanced Victim Support:**  
Improve access to **psychological counselling, legal aid, and rehabilitation services** for survivors of online abuse.
- **Stricter Legal Enforcement:**  
Strengthen legal frameworks and ensure **robust monitoring and timely prosecution** of OCSA-related crimes to serve as deterrents.

#### Way Forward

- **Adopt a Holistic Approach:**  
Combating OCSA requires a **multi-pronged strategy** involving education reform, digital inclusion, legal enforcement, and social engagement.
- **Build Resilience Through Collaboration:**  
Government, civil society, educators, families, and children must **work together** to foster a safe and empowering digital ecosystem for children.
- **Ensure Long-Term Institutional Commitment:**  
Continuous investment in **capacity building, policy updates, and community mobilization** is essential to protect children in the digital era.

Source: <https://www.newindianexpress.com/states/karnataka/2025/Jun/14/more-children-falling-prey-to-online-sexual-abuse-in-karnataka>