

# Executive Summary

This report presents the findings of the **Terre des Hommes (TdH) Baseline Study on Online Child Sexual Exploitation (OCSE)** in six municipalities in **Cebu, Philippines**. The study assesses **local government, civil society, and community capacities** to prevent and respond to OCSE, examining gaps in awareness, policy implementation, and support mechanisms. The findings aim to **strengthen child protection frameworks and inform evidence-based interventions** to safeguard children from online exploitation.

## Objectives of the Study

The study aimed to:

- 1. Assess the awareness, knowledge, and capacity** of local government units (LGUs), barangay officials, civil society organizations (CSOs), families, and children regarding OCSE.
- 2. Examine the existing policies, response mechanisms, and child protection structures** at the city, municipal, and barangay levels.
- 3. Identify gaps and challenges** in addressing OCSE, including barriers to enforcement and service provision.
- 4. Provide recommendations** to strengthen local child protection initiatives and multi-sectoral collaboration.

## Methodology

The study employed a **mixed-method approach**, combining:

- **Key Informant Interviews (KIIs)** with LGU officials, social workers, law enforcement, and CSO representatives.
- **Focus Group Discussions (FGDs)** with children, parents, and community leaders.
- **Perception Surveys** among households to gauge awareness and beliefs about OCSE.
- **Document Review** of policies, ordinances, and case records related to child protection and OCSE.

The study covered **35 barangays in six cities and municipalities**, with **93 participants**, including local government officials, CSO representatives, and community members.

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## Key Findings

### 1. Awareness and Understanding of OCSE

- While **local officials have high awareness of children's rights and general child protection laws**, knowledge about **OCSE's specific nature, digital exploitation methods, and online grooming tactics** remains low.

- Misinformation and harmful stereotypes** persist, with some officials believing that OCSE is limited to urban areas or that only girls are victims.

- Community awareness about OCSE is low, with **limited discussions on online safety** in households and schools.

### 2. Gaps in Local Child Protection Policies and Mechanisms

- Only two cities (Cebu and Mandaue) have ordinances specifically addressing OCSE**, such as regulations on **internet cafes and money transfer centers** used in online exploitation.

- Local child protection structures, such as the **Local Council for the Protection of Children (LCPCs)** and **Barangay Councils for the Protection of Children (BCPCs)**, exist but **vary in functionality**. Some councils are **inactive or undergoing reorganization**, affecting their ability to respond to cases.

- Monitoring and enforcement of child protection ordinances are weak**, with **low business compliance** and a **lack of coordination among agencies**.

### 3. Household and Community Vulnerabilities

- 85% of children access the internet without adult supervision**, exposing them to **risks of online grooming, exploitation, and cyber abuse**.

- 80% of children reported exposure to inappropriate sexual communication**, and **64% admitted to accessing sexually explicit materials without adult knowledge**.

- Many families **lack digital literacy and awareness** about online risks, making children more vulnerable to exploitation.

### 4. Role of Civil Society Organizations (CSOs)

- CSOs are critical in delivering **child survivor support programs, advocacy campaigns, and community education initiatives**.

- However, their **reach is limited due to funding constraints**, and **collaboration with LGUs needs to be strengthened** for more effective prevention and response.

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## Recommendations

### 1. Strengthen Local Government Response to OCSE

- Expand **LGU ordinances to regulate internet cafes, social media access, and financial transactions linked to OCSE.**
- Activate and capacitate **LCPCs and BCPCs** to monitor child protection programs effectively.
- Establish **local task forces dedicated to OCSE prevention**, integrating efforts from law enforcement, social welfare, and education sectors.

### 2. Enhance Community Awareness and Digital Literacy

- Develop **community-based education campaigns** on internet safety and online grooming.
- Train **parents, teachers, and barangay officials** on **recognizing online exploitation risks** and responding appropriately.
- Integrate **digital safety modules into school curriculums** to equip children with knowledge of online risks.

### 3. Improve Child Protection Services and Support Systems

- Expand access to **child-friendly reporting mechanisms and crisis intervention services** for OCSE survivors.
- Strengthen **multi-sectoral coordination** among LGUs, CSOs, and law enforcement to ensure a **more comprehensive and survivor-centered response.**
- Increase government investment in **psychosocial support and rehabilitation services** for affected children and families.

### 4. Leverage Technology for OCSE Prevention and Monitoring

- Collaborate with **internet service providers (ISPs) and tech companies** to block OCSE-related content and track exploitation cases.
- Develop **automated monitoring systems** for online child protection violations.
- Encourage **responsible digital policies** among social media platforms and online financial services.

## Conclusion

The study highlights **critical gaps in policy enforcement, community awareness, and support services** contributing to the growing risks of OCSE in Cebu. **Strengthening local government structures, expanding digital literacy initiatives, and enhancing child protection mechanisms** are essential to combatting online exploitation. A **multi-sectoral, technology-driven, and community-centered approach** is needed to create a safer online environment for children and uphold their rights in the digital age.