

## Abstract

# The Problem of Protecting Child and Youth Victims of Sexual Exploitation and Policy Response Measures: Focusing on the Transmission of Sexual Images and Videos

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The brutality of the “Nth Room” sexual exploitation case, which was widely reported in the news in early 2020, and the fact that more than half of the victims were teenagers, greatly shocked South Korean society. Due to this incident, legal provisions were established to punish crimes that sexually exploit children and youth; the purchase and viewing of materials that sexually exploit children and youth became punishable; and undercover operations were

introduced in order to indict people who groom children online.

Looking at the content of the “Nth Room” case, there was a tendency for incidents to start with sexual images or videos being sent by the victim either by his or her own will or by coercion. The perpetrator sees private information, sexual messages, or images that were posted by children/youth on social networking services, or approaches them by talking with them in random chatting.

With the spread of mobile devices, irrespective of location or space, and in this situation where children and youth can easily access pornography and sexually exploitative materials, there is the phenomena that they themselves are producing and distributing “materials that sexually exploit children and youth.” Although there is a high risk that children and youth can be targeted for online sexual exploitation, it is difficult for parents to supervise their children’s mobile phone use.

The act of transmitting and receiving sexual messages, images, and videos online using devices such as mobile phones is defined as sexting. Incidents where children and youth have been sexually exploited online are frequently reported in the news, but there is insufficient research showing the route of how they were victimized, how they responded afterwards, and what difficulties they faced.

Therefore, this study attempts to understand the route of how they became sexually exploited and their response after victimization. Based on this, we have pointed out related problems and prepared measures to respond to sexual exploitation crimes targeting children and adolescents, as well as measures to protect victims.

To this end, we investigated the perceptions and experiences of children and youth, parents, workers in educational institutions, workers in institutions that support victims, and police officers

regarding the victimization of children and adolescents in cases of sexting and sexual exploitation. Since victimization by online sexual exploitation is not limited to only some children and youth, we also included a general population of children, youth, and parents in the interviews. Interviews were conducted with a total of 73 people, and based on this, we proposed a plan to improve policy.

Today, children and youth form friendships or communicate with friends online on a daily basis, and they naturally even accept contact with strangers. They can also be victims of violence or sexual exploitation in the process of conversing and sending and receiving messages and videos online. Parents and educational institutions are not responding smoothly to this new type of problem that is online sexual exploitation.

The children and youth who have been victimized suffer from guilt, blaming themselves and feeling it was their own fault because they directly participated in sexual conversations and sent sexual videos by their own will or by coercion. They are extremely reluctant to inform their parents because they think they are not “pure victims”, which makes it difficult to report and punish perpetrators. If parents find out about the victimization, they criticize their children out of shock and rage, and this can also make it difficult for child and youth victims to heal and recover.

Based on this study, the following policy improvement plans are proposed. First, it is urgent to rescue child and youth victims who have given up reporting. To this end, it is necessary to amend the National Police Agency’s criminal investigation regulations that require parents to be notified mandatorily. Second, it is necessary to improve the police investigation system that investigates cases of online sexual exploitation targeting children and youth. Third, in addition to the recent revision of the law to punish crimes that target

children and youth for online sexual exploitation, we presented legal provisions that should be improved. Fourth, it is necessary for online businesses to play an active role in reporting and preventing illegal sexual materials that exploit children and youth online. Fifth, it is necessary to establish an integrated organization to effectively respond to support for victims, and to prevent the online sexual exploitation of children and youth. Sixth, there is a need for a system that helps parents monitor their children's mobile phone use well. Finally, an educational approach is required in handling online sexual exploitation cases that occur between schoolmates.

Research areas: gender-based violence, online sexual violence

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