

Livestreaming and Virtual Child Sex Trafficking

Online child sexual exploitation has increased dramatically over the past few decades.¹ Minors access digital devices, the internet, and social media platforms at much younger ages than in the past, and devices and platforms are expanding the capacity for image creation and sharing. Further, current technology allows offenders to purchase livestreamed child sexual abuse from “sellers” or facilitators in foreign countries. Such conduct is sometimes referred to as “cybersex trafficking,”² “livestreaming of child sexual abuse”³ or, as here, “virtual child sex trafficking.” The latter terminology more appropriately reflects the commercial element in these online exchanges, which are done for a financial benefit.⁴

Livestreaming Child Sexual Exploitation (LCSE)

Livestreaming child sexual exploitation (LCSE) occurs when an offender compels a child victim to engage in sexually explicit conduct during a broadcast, in real time, to one or more viewers. There are generally three types of LCSE: child “self-generated,” offender-streaming, and virtual child sex trafficking.

- **Child “Self-Generated”:** This type of LCSE occurs when an offender coerces, tricks, or otherwise compels children to engage in sexually explicit conduct on a livestream, typically from the child’s bedrooms or a bathroom. In some cases, this activity occurs under the pretext of the offender and victim being in a romantic relationship.
- **Offender-streaming:** Offender-streaming LCSE occurs when an offender sexually abuses a child in person while livestreaming the abuse to viewers. The offender is usually someone who knows, and has easy access to, the victim, such as a family member or a family friend. The viewers may not know each other in real life. They often participate in the activity by requesting that specific sex acts be committed.
- **Virtual Child Sex Trafficking:** In this form of LCSE, offenders pay to watch while another offender sexually abuses a child in person or offenders pay a victim directly to create “self-generated” CSAM. Because of the interactive nature of livestreaming platforms, offenders can request specific sexual abuse acts for an additional cost. Payment is usually made digitally. This offense often involves offenders in the United States and facilitators and children in foreign countries. Children may be transported from rural areas of that foreign country to urban settings in furtherance of this crime.

¹ WeProtect 2021 Global Threat Assessment <https://www.weprotect.org/global-threat-assessment-21/>

² See e.g. *IJM 2016 Casework Factsheet on Cybersex Trafficking* available at [IJM.org](https://www.ijm.org)

³ *United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime’s E4J University Module Series: Cybercrime Module 12: Interpersonal Cybercrime, Online child sexual exploitation and abuse* (published in May 2019, updated in February 2020) available at <https://www.unodc.org/e4j/en/cybercrime/module-12/key-issues/online-child-sexual-exploitation-and-abuse.html>

⁴ See also *U.S. Department of State Trafficking in Persons Report* (2021) available at <https://www.state.gov/trafficking-in-persons-report/>; *IJM Summary Report Online Sexual Exploitation of Children in the Philippines: Analysis and Recommendations for Governments, Industry, and Civil Society* retrieved from <https://www.ijm.ca/stories/online-sexual-exploitation-of-children-hidden-in-plain-sight>.

The use of livestreaming on social media has become extremely popular among children and adolescents. Livestreaming allows a user to produce real-time video that is broadcast over an online social media platform, whether viewed publicly or by a restricted audience. As of 2018, 42% of the population in the U.S. was livestreaming online content, up from 25% the prior year.⁵ It is reasonably anticipated that this number will rise in the post-pandemic era, particularly among children who were called on to use livestreaming technology daily as part of remote learning. Live.me, Periscope, and Omegle are among the most popular platforms for livestreaming, along with livestreaming capabilities on mainstream platforms like Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, YouTube, Snapchat, and Twitch. Most platforms have a chat feature where users can interact with the viewers of their content. No special equipment is required, as livestreaming can be done easily with any internet-capable device, including smart phones, which are now ubiquitous, and new platforms are constantly emerging.⁶

As livestreaming platforms have proliferated, offenders have increasingly engaged in LCSE to coerce a child's self-generated content and stream in-person abuse to others. Some people perceive child self-generated LCSE as less harmful than in-person abuse (also referred to as hands-on abuse) to victims because it occurs remotely, but it is important to recognize all forms of LCSE can leave profound and lasting negative impacts on a child. The trauma caused by LCSE and other forms of online child exploitation is compounded by the victim's knowledge that documentation of their abuse will live on the internet in perpetuity. It's critical that victims of online child sexual abuse receive robust, ongoing victim services to aid in their healing.

Virtual Child Sex Trafficking

Like other kinds of human trafficking, virtual child sex trafficking may involve a facilitator and a buyer, both of whom exploit the child. This differs from other types of child exploitation in which a child is directly groomed or enticed into the abuse by one offender. Because of the financial aspects inherent in this crime some prosecutors charge this conduct as child sex trafficking under 18 U.S.C. § 1591.⁷

Virtual Child Sex Trafficking refers to the livestreaming and often real-time abuse of children by way of video-enabled internet communication platforms such as Skype, and other, smaller webcam applications in exchange for money or something else of value.

Much of this kind of exploitation begins when the victims are infants or toddlers and can continue over many years. Offenders who purchase access to the content may participate in the abuse by requesting what they want to see in advance or directing the abuse as it occurs. Offenders may not record the livestream, but if they do, memorialization and distribution of new CSAM exacerbates the harm and trauma to the child.⁸

⁵ Nielsen U.S. Video 360 Report 2018 <https://www.nielsen.com/us/en/insights/report/2018/video-360-2018-report/>

⁶ See, <https://www.pewresearch.org/internet/fact-sheet/mobile/>.

⁷ See, e.g. *United States v. Sara*, as cited above.

⁸ See *New York v. Ferber*, 458 U. S. 747, 759 (1982) (“The distribution of photographs and films depicting sexual activity by juveniles is intrinsically related to the sexual abuse of children [...] the materials produced are a permanent record of the children's participation and the harm to the child is exacerbated by their circulation.”)

The prevalence of virtual child sex trafficking is unknown, due in part, to the difficulties in detecting this type of conduct. Virtual child sex trafficking viewed in English-speaking countries appears to be frequently generated in the Philippines, where knowledge of English and the widespread availability of high-speed internet facilitate communication, and poverty motivates using children to acquire money.⁹ This type of abuse does not just occur in the Philippines; it occurs throughout the world, including in the United States. Because it only requires that facilitators¹⁰ and buyers can connect via the internet, virtual child sex trafficking can happen anywhere. The economic disparity between “buyers” and “sellers,” is often extreme;¹¹ the cost of “on demand” child sex abuse can be \$20 USD or less.¹² Moreover, because of how the abuse is perpetrated and the difficulty of detection, the sexual abuse often lasts for years. In some cases, the trafficker or facilitator is a mother or other female relative.¹³ Even when no parent is involved in the actual trafficking, parents are often aware of the abuse because they are benefitting financially from the crimes.

The offenses typically involve buyers in wealthy, higher-infrastructure countries (e.g., United States and the United Kingdom) and victims and sellers or facilitators in poorer, lower-infrastructure countries.¹⁴ However, this type of exploitation can also occur within any country in which there is economic disparity. The increasing availability of internet connectivity and platforms, particularly in countries and communities with fewer socio-economic resources, has contributed to the increasing volume and prevalence of such cases.¹⁵ Offenses can involve a single buyer and seller, or a sophisticated network of offenders offering child exploitation as a commodity to a large customer base.

⁹ The Philippines receives thousands of cybersex-trafficking case referrals a month from the U.S. alone. The estimated number of Philippine IP addresses used for child sexual exploitation each year tripled from 2014 to 2017. Due to limitations in the data, this could reflect of an actual rise in the occurrence of the crime, a rise in the reporting of the crime, or both. *IJM 2016 Casework Factsheet on Cybersex Trafficking* available at IJM.org. See also *IJM Summary Report Online Sexual Exploitation of Children in the Philippines: Analysis and Recommendations for Governments, Industry, and Civil Society* <https://www.ijm.ca/stories/online-sexual-exploitation-of-children-hidden-in-plain-sight>

¹⁰ A “facilitator” acts as the go-between between the victim and the customer and is frequently a relative of the victim. Facilitators may also be the ones directed to abuse the victims in specific ways.

¹¹ “Almost a quarter of the population of the Philippines lives on less than US \$ 1.25 a day.” *ECPAT’s 2017 Regional Overview: Sexual Exploitation of Children in Southeast Asia* at p. 25 <https://ecpat.org/resources/>

¹² See *United. States v. Benjamin Walter* (5:19-cr-00073-AKK-GMB) District Court, N.D. Alabama; see also reporting on Australian offenders paying A\$15 for children to perform sexual acts online <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/dec/09/australian-paedophiles-pay-15-dollars-online-abuse-filipino-children>

¹³ Based on investigative and prosecutorial information provided by the authors, observing the percentage of female offenders in this crime seems to be substantially higher than in other child sex abuse offenses.

¹⁴ *Europol (2015a) Virtual Global Taskforce Child Sexual Exploitation Environmental Scan* at p. 6 (Law enforcement agents from countries such as the United States, Australia, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom, who were queried as to the impact of increasing internet coverage in developing countries with regard to online CSAM in their respective jurisdictions, “mainly referred to the increase in the livestreaming of child sexual abuse to their nationals from developing countries, although this type of crime was also reported as being committed on a national level”), available at <https://www.europol.europa.eu/publications-documents/vgt-cse-environmental-scan-2015>. Further, “the relatively high financial rewards available to organisers of live-distant child abuse in developing countries were indicated as a significant driver contributing to its widespread proliferation.” *Id.* at p. 7.

¹⁵ Baines, V. (2019). *Online child sexual exploitation: Towards an optimal international response* at p.4. (“Geographical areas of burgeoning internet connectivity and socio-economic deprivation have tended to be hotspots for the production of for [livestreamed child sexual abuse] for commercial distribution.”).

Financial transactions associated with this type of abuse usually involve sending relatively small amounts of money, often by wire transfer or virtual currencies. Like other forms of exploitation based in part on global inequities, particularly human trafficking, virtual child sex trafficking offenders exploit the poverty of vulnerable victims and their families. The increasing number of willing buyers increases the demand for both sellers and the children they abuse, creating a vicious cycle commercializing the sexual exploitation of children.

Some offenders participate in the online sexual exploitation of minors abroad and then travel to perpetrate hands-on offenses, known as extraterritorial child sexual abuse.¹⁶ Therefore, combating virtual child sex trafficking is also important to the interdiction of other child exploitation crimes. Combating virtual child sex trafficking, like other forms of online child exploitation, requires substantial international coordination and cooperation. Law enforcement resources dedicated to investigating this type of abuse are woefully inadequate. Investigations frequently involve complex forensic data analysis due to offenders' use of multiple internet platforms and the often-complex financial component of the crime. Effective strategies must address both the supply and demand side, emphasize evidence sharing, target offenders, and conduct outreach to vulnerable communities. These cases also require enhanced, dedicated victim services to ensure survivors get adequate care. As explained in more detail below, because these cases are more complex and more difficult to investigate than other kinds of child abuse cases, more resources must be allocated to increase awareness of and collaboration on this global crime.

Reporting

Two primary challenges exist related to the reporting of livestreaming and virtual child sex trafficking. The first is detecting LCSE, because livestreamed content is often unmonitored by internet service providers.¹⁷ The use of children is frequently cloaked or embedded within internet sites that offer virtual livestreamed adult sex. Thus, looking at transactional information or even the initial advertisement webpage does not reveal that children are involved. Unlike traditional CSAM investigations that involve images, many instances of LCSE and virtual child sex trafficking go undetected by internet platforms and other online providers, even after the event, because the abuse is livestreamed and there is typically no captured content. Even if providers or other users are aware and want to report the abuse to law enforcement, the lack of preserved digital evidence hinders or prevents investigations, including victim identification.

Second, electronic communication service providers and other online platforms where this kind of exploitation occurs are often not statutorily required to report these crimes, or the information they are required to provide is insufficient to assist investigators in locating and identifying offenders and victims. There is broad disparity across platforms in what kinds of information providers are willing or able to supply. There are also vast differences in technical infrastructure,

¹⁶ See e.g. *United States v. Burt*, NDCA, 3:15-cr-00137-WHO, <https://www.justice.gov/usao-ndca/pr/hayward-man-sentenced-over-ten-years-imprisonment-receipt-child-pornography-and-travel>. See also Interpol Report on *Threats and Trends Child Sexual Exploitation and Abuse Threats and Trends: Covid-19 Impact* at page 13 available at [interpol.int](https://www.interpol.int). Additional information can be found in the Extraterritorial Child Sexual Abuse chapter.

¹⁷ “[M]ost livestreamed abuse is transmitted online within private ‘conversations’ and is therefore not subject to screening or moderator review.” WeProtect Global Alliance’s *Global Threat Assessment 2021* at p. 62 available at <https://www.weprotect.org/global-threat-assessment-21/>.

staffing, and policies among platforms like Google or Yahoo and less widely used applications such as LiveMe. As a result, no one methodology can be applied consistently when following up on investigating an individual report from an online provider. Thus, investigators must often pursue new or unique methods of investigation, tailored to the individual platform referenced in the report.

Investigation, Prosecution, and Victim Assistance

LSCE cases present significant challenges to investigators. In most cases, the livestreamed feed is not preserved in any form by the platform on which it was broadcast.¹⁸ Few social media and streaming platforms are willing or able to voluntarily monitor their platforms to detect and report LCSE. The variety and volume of online social media and streaming platforms creates an ever-growing digital haystack. Without a complaint or a report from a company, law enforcement may not have a mechanism to find evidence of a crime.

When investigators do identify and detect LCSE, the live, real-time nature of the criminal conduct creates additional complexities. Attempting to overtly intervene to stop an instance of LCSE risks both the destruction of evidence and flight from prosecution by as-yet unidentified offenders, and significant embarrassment, humiliation, or even self-harm by a child victim who may not have realized that he or she is being victimized or does not want their victimization to be made public. If an investigation is launched, the responses to legal process from social media providers are inconsistent and incomplete, frequently yielding little, if any, available evidence of the LCSE itself even pursuant to legal process, since livestream footage often is not preserved.

Therefore, investigators often need to rely on peripheral or circumstantial evidence, such as written communications and financial transactions between the facilitator and the buyer to prove what kind of content was actually streamed and paid for. When agents connect information gleaned from financial transactions with other evidence, including leads involving the same suspect on other platforms, they are better able to build a strong case. Agents should not rule out the possibility that LCSE has been recorded in some format and possibly shared.

Case Story: United States v. Sara¹⁹

In 2017, Carl Sara from Springfield, VA, was sentenced to 168 months in prison for attempting to entice an eight-year-old to have sex with him during a 2013 trip to the Philippines. In 2013, Sara participated in virtual child sex trafficking by way of webcam sessions depicting minors engaged in sexually explicit conduct, along with instant message chatting with facilitators in the Philippines and elsewhere. During some of these chats, Sara discussed with a woman in the Philippines, plans for him to have sex with her eight-year-old daughter during an upcoming trip to the country. Sara sent the mother \$200 dollars in return for the mother's agreement and offered to pay her an additional \$300 after he had sex with the child.

¹⁸ While not preserved, offenders may still be prosecuted under United States "production" of child pornography laws.

¹⁹ *United States v. Sara* (1:17-cr-00054) District Court, E.D. Virginia <https://www.justice.gov/opa/pr/virginia-man-sentenced-14-years-prison-attempting-entice-eight-year-old-minor-have-sex>

Sara then traveled to the Philippines to have sex with the eight-year-old and other minor children. During this trip, he paid for sex with another minor, a 16-year-old girl. Investigators confirmed Sara sent wire transfers overseas totaling more than \$33,000, the majority of which paid for live webcam shows depicting minors engaged in sexually explicit conduct. Sara routinely sought out mothers with young children in the Philippines to persuade them to allow him to have sex with their children.

Virtual sex trafficking has its own distinct investigative challenges. As noted above, virtual child sex trafficking involves a monetary payment or other exchange for value, making it a commercial transaction. Because virtual child sex trafficking generates profits, perpetrators often commit financial crimes to conceal illicit profits, whether in the form of cash, foreign currency, or cryptocurrency. One of the most effective ways to deter criminals, including those who exploit children, and to stem the harms that flow from their actions is to follow the money, expose illicit activity, and prevent criminal networks from benefiting from the use of the United States' economy and financial system. Federal prosecutors have a wide range of tools to combat the financial aspects of virtual child sex trafficking. For example, the Bank Secrecy Act of 1970 (BSA) mandates reporting designed to prevent criminals from exploiting the U.S. financial system. The BSA requires financial institutions, including banks, casinos, money service businesses, and virtual currency exchanges, to file reports, including Currency Transaction Reports (CTRs) and Suspicious Activity Reports (SARs), regarding transactions that meet certain thresholds or suspicious financial transactions. Law enforcement can use the data reported in SARs and CTRs, among other BSA reports,²⁰ to identify perpetrators and facilitators of sex trafficking, including virtual child sex trafficking.

Despite these tools, identifying a target's assets can be difficult; many virtual traffickers do not deposit their illicit proceeds in traditional financial institutions. The use of virtual currencies in these cases compounds the problem because virtual currencies can provide pseudo-anonymity, can be transmitted quickly, and are subject to varying levels of regulation and supervision globally. Virtual currency users also "rely on technology that conceals their location and identity from law enforcement."²¹ Thus, it can be difficult to identify who is using virtual currency to pay for access to virtual child sex trafficking content or to fund digital infrastructure, such as advertisements for livestreaming of children. These investigations require the same depth and breadth of analysis and tracing as traditional financial investigations.

Clearly, investigating virtual child sex trafficking crimes requires complex, staffing-intensive investigative techniques, often involving undercover operations. Investigators need to know where to look for these crimes (where on a particular platform and where in the world) and how to connect with offenders and facilitators. Undercover investigators often spend significant time developing relationships with suspects on these platforms to determine who poses the most immediate risk to children. There are numerous platforms where offenders meet to discuss in detail their sexual interest in children and plans to abuse them.

²⁰ <https://www.fincen.gov/resources/filing-information>

²¹ See U.S. Dep't of the Treasury (Treasury), *National Money Laundering Risk Assessment* (2018) at 26, available at https://home.treasury.gov/system/files/136/2018NMLRA_12-18.pdf.

Additionally, as the facilitators and/or sellers are most often located outside the United States, U.S. law enforcement must rely on or work with foreign law enforcement to find, question, and arrest suspects located abroad. This presents its own logistical and legal challenges and requires extensive coordination with foreign law enforcement and NGOs. In countries where victims distrust law enforcement, sometimes U.S. law enforcement succeed with the assistance of the in-country resources of NGOs, collaborating with NGOs as the investigation and prosecution progress. Just as differing practices between U.S. and foreign law enforcement can pose challenges to subsequent U.S. prosecutions, so too can differing practices employed by NGOs.

Targeting offenders in the U.S. and other more developed parts of the world is only part of the solution because it must be accompanied by comprehensive efforts to prevent the continued abuse and distribution of illicit content from developing countries. The U.S. must work with NGOs to address the issues created by widespread poverty in developing countries to prevent these crimes. NGOs can also assist law enforcement in child identification and rescue, and in supporting local efforts for interdiction and prosecution.

Foreign victim interviews are an important component of virtual child sex trafficking investigations but present potential challenges for investigators and prosecutors. Offenders are increasingly targeting ever-younger victims. Interviewing such young victims requires specialized training and experience. Even with experienced interviewers, exceedingly young, sometimes pre-verbal, victims may not be developmentally able to articulate their experiences. If the facilitator is related to the victim, it may be difficult or impossible to obtain an interview or a disclosure of the extent of the abuse and the relative's involvement. There are also diverse cultural, social, and even governmental norms to consider, beyond the victims' developmental maturity and understanding of what has happened to them. For example, some foreign government and law enforcement agencies have special policies that apply to video interviews of victims and are hesitant to record such interviews. Young victims' beliefs and attitudes on privacy, sexuality and sexual abuse, personal autonomy, and respect for or trust in law enforcement are informed by cultural and social norms. Thus, success in these cases requires sensitivity by, and specialized trauma informed and culturally appropriate training for, interviewers and investigators.

Children who have been victims of virtual child sex trafficking need a robust and structured support system to help them navigate the trauma they have experienced and their role in subsequent legal processes. Assistance to victims located overseas is always complex, often made more challenging by a lack of sufficient resources to support them. Where the abuse has been perpetrated and/or facilitated by family members, assisting minor victims on their journeys to recovery is even more difficult. Appropriate medical exams, mental and physical health care, adequate living conditions, access to school, meaningful aftercare programs, and other considerations in the best interests of the child should be part of a victim's recovery. Not all countries have such supports in place, and it often falls to law enforcement and NGOs to fill the gaps for victims.

Successful U.S. prosecutions may result in awards of restitution to victims, but there is an acute lack of adequate mechanisms to administer and distribute restitution funds to foreign-located

victims. In some cases, the government may seek to establish a trust holding the restitution funds; however, that option requires trustees who can develop and coordinate instruments to disburse the funds to benefit victims located overseas.

Significant Developments

Incidences of LCSE and virtual child sex trafficking have been and are likely to continue to increase because of the COVID-19 pandemic.²² Children spending an extensive amount of time on the internet provides a fertile online hunting ground for offenders. School closures and limited in-person contact with friends increased the time minors spent online. Parents who work from home are unable to continually monitor their children’s online activity. Because of the pandemic, offenders, too, spent more time online during hours that overlapped with children, creating a perfect storm of opportunity for exploitation of children, even as offenders lost access to victims in-person through their work, volunteer activities, or other means.²³

While more data is needed to quantify the impact of COVID-19 on LCSE, Homeland Security Investigations has observed an increase in the presence of children on livestreaming platforms in general and in self-generated sexually explicit material. At the same time, the pandemic has reduced available resources and increased demands on law enforcement, potentially limiting their ability to investigate and combat the increase in LCSE. In a survey of 470 law enforcement officers from 39 countries who work on child sex abuse cases, more than half of respondents reported that the fallout from the pandemic affected law enforcement capacity to investigate child sexual abuse. They reported that an increase in workload, limitations associated with working from home, suspended search warrants, difficulties in conducting interviews and limited court processes led to slower processing time or cases not being investigated at all.²⁴

Strategic Response

Short-Term Goals	Long-Term Goals
<p>Expand international cooperation in investigations: Offenders are using livestreaming platforms to victimize children without regard to jurisdiction. Collaboration across national, regional, and international law enforcement agencies is necessary to investigate the global nature of online child sexual exploitation.</p>	<p>Explore sustainable methods to combat child sexual exploitation and abuse on livestreaming platforms: Engage with online internet service providers to raise awareness of the complexities of LCSE and virtual child sex trafficking that allow offenders to interact with children in real time and leave limited evidence of their crimes.</p>

²² Interpol Report on *Threats and Trends Child Sexual Exploitation and Abuse Threats and Trends: Covid-19 Impact* at page 13. (“Livestreaming of child sexual exploitation for payment has seen an increase in recent years, and the demand is likely to rise as travel restrictions remain in place. The supply of livestreamed CSEAM is also likely to increase as victims may be locked down with facilitators (often a family member) and economic hardship increases.”) available at [interpol.int](https://www.interpol.int). CSEAM refers to Child Sexual Exploitation and Abuse Materials and is an equivalent term to CSAM.

²³ Europol Internet Organised Crime Threat Assessment (Iocta) 2020 <https://www.europol.europa.eu/activities-services/main-reports/internet-organised-crime-threat-assessment-iocta-2020>

²⁴ The NetClean Report 2020: COVID-19 Impact 2020 <https://www.netclean.com/netclean-report-2020/>

<p>Develop new detection technology: Livestreaming platforms should pursue, and federal agencies support the development of, new technological services to detect initial captures and redistributions of livestreamed child sexual abuse online. This work should be conducted in collaboration with law enforcement and NGOs working in the space.</p>	<p>Adopt successful NGO partnership models: Expand successful partnership models to other countries and NGOs to fill law enforcement gaps in foreign jurisdictions, to provide investigative resources, to provide victim advocacy and services, and to facilitate restitution claims on behalf of victims.</p>
<p>Expand international training: Expand training to combat virtual child sex trafficking, including how to sensitively interview foreign child victims, gather and analyze evidence of communications and payments exchanged, and assess and facilitate restitution claims.</p>	<p>Deepen capabilities of foreign law enforcement: Continue investing in investigatory collaboration with foreign law enforcement and promote capacity building in such countries, to strengthen their ability to investigate and prosecute these cases themselves.</p>
<p>Leverage U.S. Diplomatic Security Service (DSS) international presence: Use DSS resources, especially in places less accessible to other U.S. agencies, to provide investigatory assistance and resources to law enforcement in more remote areas.</p>	

International Cooperation

Given the cross-border, distributed nature of online child sexual exploitation, national, regional, and international law enforcement agencies often collaborate in the investigation of these cybercrimes. The threats detailed above necessitate better global collaboration among agencies, NGOs, and law enforcement agencies. Standard approaches for international cooperation in criminal matters, such as mutual legal assistance and extradition, and multilateral conventions and agreements on child sexual exploitation and abuse, will help combat the expansion of interconnected online networks for child exploitation.

Aside from collaboration, it is critical that more resources be allocated to increase the numbers of law enforcement personnel who are trained and dedicated to investigating these crimes. Finally, either through court-appointed advocates or pro bono efforts, legal expertise must be marshalled to develop and administer victim restitution.

Training & Education

In the short term, U.S.-based investigators and interviewers would benefit from more in-depth training. Regarding international trainings, shifting the focus from solely high-level prosecutors and judges to local officers and investigators at the beginning of their careers will increase awareness and capacity. U.S. agents who serve in legal attaché offices abroad often do not have a background in investigating child exploitation cases and thus require additional training. Involving foreign local law enforcement in the trainings with the legal attaché offices would build collaboration and facilitate partnerships to help investigate and prosecute future cases.

Domestic training should focus on investigative methodologies, navigating interactions with family members or caregivers complicit in the abuse, child forensic interviewing, and regional and cultural background information, among other topics. Forensic interviewers and investigators must understand and be trained on the unique aspects of virtual sex trafficking offenses and how best to prepare for forensic interviews of victims. Proper preparation and collaboration can increase the chance of successful forensic interviews, resulting in both disclosures of abuse and information identifying offenders. Training should also include awareness and understanding of cultural issues that could impact victims during both the investigation and prosecution stages. When faced with a particular investigative lead, forensic interviewers who are talking to victims and investigators who are putting together the entire case should be mindful of how cultural issues could impact the investigation and know what resources are available to navigate those issues with victims and offenders abroad, and in foreign legal systems. Training must also focus on preservation and presentation of evidence, which can be particularly challenging in international investigations.

Partnerships

In addition to training, there should be increased emphasis on interdisciplinary and intergovernmental cooperation. U.S. investigators and agencies will be more successful when they build relationships that assist with resources and cultural issues in regions where virtual child sex trafficking is common. For instance, the U.S. Diplomatic Security Service (DSS) has a presence all over the world. Significantly, DSS has regional security offices in countries where FBI and HSI do not have legal attachés. Thus, DSS could provide resources and assistance to federal investigators in these areas. U.S. law enforcement should also focus on building relationships with foreign law enforcement and engage in collaborative and informed investigations on both sides to dismantle both individual buyers and sellers of virtual sex trafficking, and sophisticated organizations built around the market for LCSE material. U.S. law enforcement and resources should also promote capacity building in other countries, to facilitate investigations and prosecutions by foreign law enforcement in their jurisdictions.

Funding assistance can provide resources and build relationships among international agencies and governments with common goals of prosecuting child traffickers, helping victims of virtual child sex trafficking receive comprehensive, trauma-informed care, and working together to prevent the crime from happening. For example, to improve its response to virtual child sex trafficking, the Philippines partnered with the United States and signed the four-year U.S.-Philippines Child Protection Compact (CPC) Partnership (2017-2021). In support of the CPC Partnership's objectives, the United States committed over four million dollars in foreign assistance over the course of the CPC Partnership to civil society organizations that acted as CPC implementing partners, carrying out the capacity-strengthening activities agreed upon by the two governments. One of those organizations, International Justice Mission (IJM), along with support from U.S. law enforcement, developed and provided comprehensive training to Philippine law enforcement on internet crimes against children investigations and digital forensic evidence collection. Further, IJM provided technical assistance to key court officials, including prosecutors and judges, on application of child appropriate procedures and the use of digital

evidence for virtual child sex trafficking cases. This model could prove useful in other countries where children are victims of virtual child sex trafficking.

Industry Engagement

As a more long-term solution to the LCSE epidemic, livestreaming companies could develop and deploy measures to monitor for sexually explicit content on their servers, such as by obtaining and saving every few frames from each live broadcast. Social media companies also could use real-time intervention to educate and engage users about online safety. A livestreaming platform called Yubo, which is owned and operated by a French company, is leading the way in this domain. Yubo enforces a strict no-nudity policy that is enforced through the capture, scanning, and preservation of a snapshot of the livestream every few seconds. Any violations are immediately reported to the police. This shows that such practices are feasible and may be a promising way to better identify livestreaming offenders and victims, and to preserve evidence. Training and relationship building are important cornerstones for all efforts to prevent and combat LCSE and virtual child sex trafficking.