

Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children (CSEC) in coastal Kenya – Prevalence Estimation Report

Context

As a part of its partnership with the U.S. Department of State's Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons (TIP Office), the Global Fund to End Modern Slavery (GFEMS) has launched a series of projects to combat commercial sexual exploitation of children (CSEC) in coastal Kenya. NORC at the University of Chicago was contracted by GFEMS to lead an independent research study to obtain pre- and post-intervention point estimates of the count of CSEC victims in Mombasa, Kilifi, and Kwale counties of Kenya.

Our primary methodological approach for obtaining CSEC point estimates is link-tracing, a variation of two common approaches used to measure hidden and hard-to-reach populations, including respondent driven sampling (RDS) and mark-recapture (or "capture-recapture").

Link-tracing combines the strengths of RDS and mark-recapture to provide an efficient way to estimate the size and characteristics of a hidden population of interest. In summary, (1) link-tracing occurs in the same fashion as RDS but does not place any sampling constraints on the individuals and therefore the network sample is not restricted to forming a tree-like structure; (2) the designs allow for "overlaps" between networks to be observed, through multiple observations (i.e., redemption of more than one referral coupon) of individuals, giving rise to a more comprehensive and accurate representation of the population network; and (3) overlaps in networks can be exploited in a mark-recapture fashion for population size estimation. As such, link-tracing can produce hidden population counts cost-effectively and on a relatively broad scale.

Key Findings

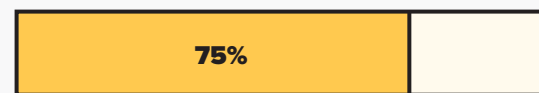
- **An estimated 6,356 children in Kilifi, Kwale, and Mombasa are currently engaged in CSEC**, accounting for 1.6 percent of the total population of 13-17 year olds across the three counties. However, this is likely underestimated relative to pre-pandemic times, as respondents reported a precipitous drop in demand for CSEC since 2020.
- **Most victims are out of school.** Slightly less than half of respondents were enrolled in school at the time of the survey, ranging from 42 percent in Mombasa to 52 percent in Kilifi. Fifty-eight percent of respondents had primary school as the highest level of schooling completed, however this varied somewhat by county (48 percent in Kwale compared to 66 percent in Mombasa). Education levels in Mombasa were lower on average than in Kilifi and Kwale, with only five percent of respondents advancing beyond primary school compared to 17 and 18 percent in Kilifi and Kwale, respectively.
- **Victims report that their parents are largely unaware of their involvement in CSEC.** Overall, 83 percent of respondents said that their parent(s) were unaware of their involvement in CSEC despite the fact that three-quarters were living at home when they first engaged in commercial sex acts. Further, only five percent said they were introduced to the sex trade by an immediate family member (parent or sibling).
- **Over 70 percent of CSEC victims are likely suffering from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).** The highest share was in Kilifi where approximately three-quarters of respondents reported at least three (of five) PTSD indicators, and the lowest in Mombasa at 67 percent. Additionally, 46 percent of respondents overall reported at least four indicators of PTSD and are thus “very likely” to have PTSD. Kwale had the highest

Study Region	Point Estimate	Prevalence Rate
Kilifi	3,328	1.76%
Kwale	1,808	1.64%
Mombasa	1,220	1.19%
Overall	6,356	1.58%

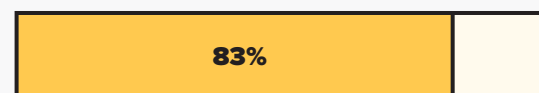
Percent of victims



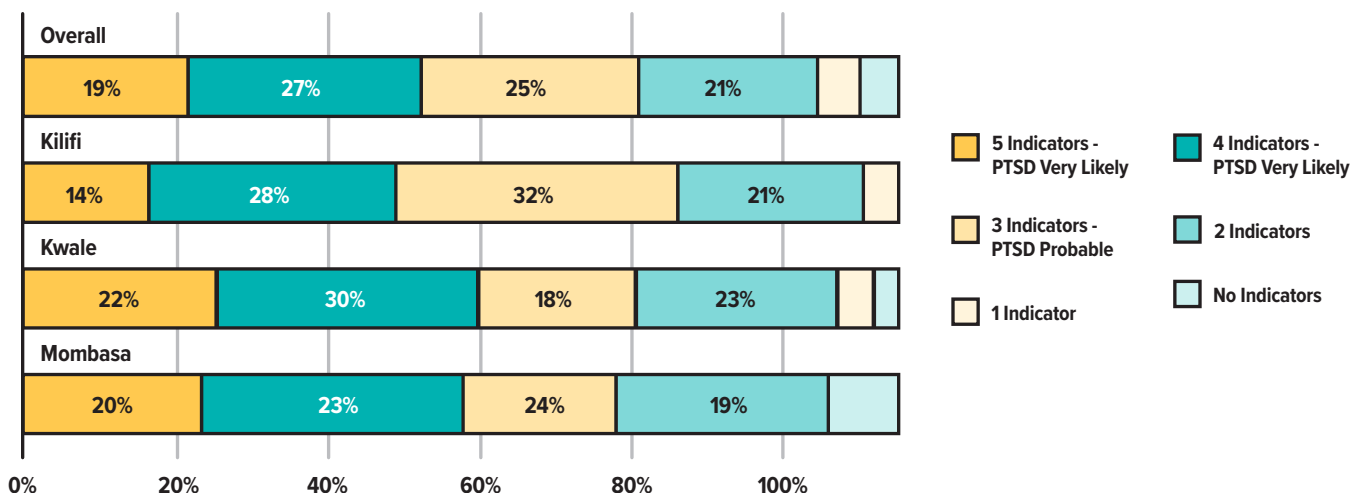
Enrolled in school



Living at home when first engaging in CSEC



Whose parents are unaware of their involvement in CSEC

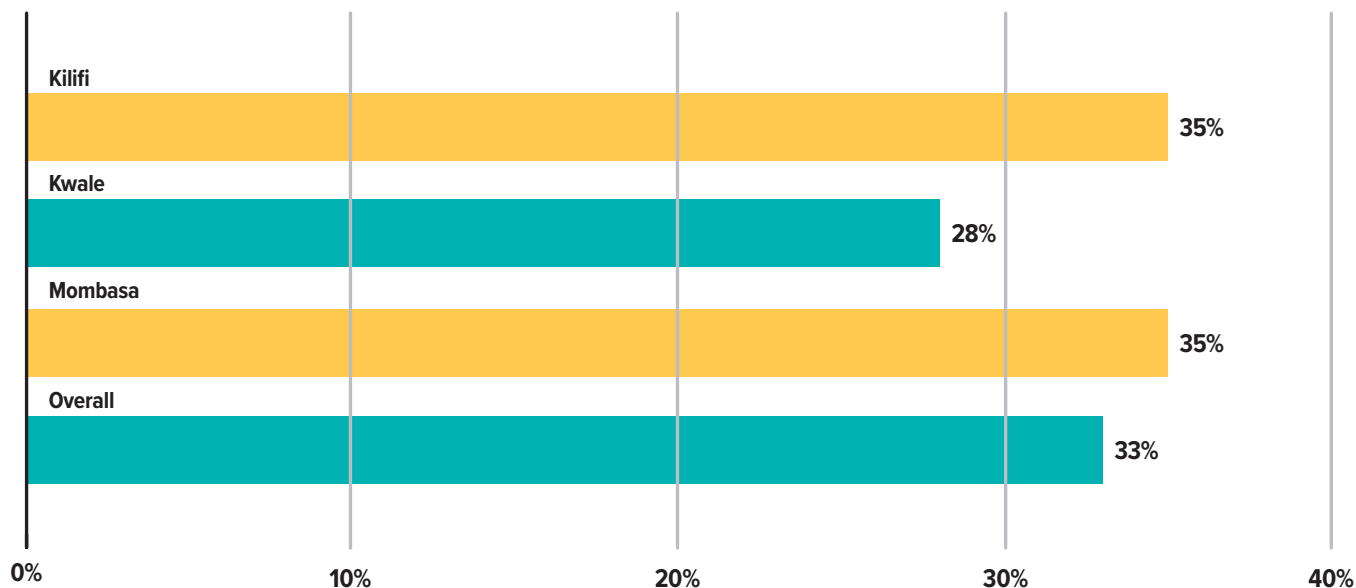


percentage of such cases at 52 percent and Mombasa the lowest at 43 percent.

- **CSEC victims regularly recruit other children into CSEC and financially profit from their involvement.** Thirty-seven percent of respondents said the person who first introduced them to the sex

trade was another minor. Furthermore, of the 35 percent of respondents who said someone else helps them find clients, nearly 20 percent of such facilitators are other children (and 78 percent are female). One-third of respondents also reported financially benefiting from arranging transactions/clients for other children in the sex trade.

Victims who earn money by arranging transactions for other children



Sampling And Measurement Approach

The total target sample for the CSEC link-tracing study was 1,500 children (500 per county) who self-reported having exchanged sex for money in the past 12 months. All study participants were provided with a referral coupon they received from either a partner NGO (the “seeds”) or from another study participant (the “waves”) which could be redeemed for a monetary incentive. This referral coupon contained a unique identification number that allowed for tracking of network relations between study participants. All respondents (both seeds and waves) were required to have met the following eligibility criteria to participate: (1) be between 13-18 years of age at the time of scheduling the interview, (2) lived and/or worked in the target county in the past 12 months, (3) done sexual things for money or things worth money like a place to stay, food, or gifts at least once in the past 12 months, and (4) in possession of a valid referral coupon. At the end of the interview, referral procedures and eligibility criteria were explained to the respondent and s/ he was asked to refer up to three other children who met the

eligibility criteria. Sample recruitment continued for as many waves as was required in order to reach the desired sample size. Respondents were also asked to nominate up to five individuals in their personal network who intersected with the study population and corresponding region. Their nominees’ covariate/demographic information was recorded to facilitate post data collection sample linking.

Data collection activities included a CSEC victim survey administered in three counties of coastal Kenya (Mombasa, Kilifi, and Kwale). Supporting activities included a phone screener to determine potential respondents’ eligibility to participate in the study (i.e., whether they fit the inclusion criteria). Data collection instruments for the CSEC victim survey were structured around CSEC statistical definitions used by the TIP Office, International Labour Organization (ILO), and Government of Kenya, and were refined in consultation with GFEMS and through a formative assessment period.

Limitations

The primary limitations of the study are as follows. First, since the initial sample forms the basis for both the design and inference components of the link-tracing strategy, a moderately sized and representative initial sample is critical for efficient inference for population level quantities. Obtaining such a sample can be challenging for especially

rare or elusive populations. Second, link-tracing requires post-data collection mapping based on covariate information which will always be subjected to a degree of error. Finally, while efforts were undertaken to minimize validity threats, the study relies on self-reporting which may be subject to response bias such as social desirability bias and incentive scheme gaming.

Recommendations

- **Sensitize families to CSEC risk factors and the importance of monitoring vulnerability among children in the household.** Low knowledge of common physical, social, and behavioral risk factors combined with the widespread view that CSEC only affects other households suggests a strong need for sensitization on monitoring CSEC vulnerability at the household level. Program implementers should therefore seek opportunities to integrate direct advocacy with parents/guardians into their existing programming.
- **Help community members see CSEC victims as children needing care and protection rather than criminals.** Data from the prevalence component of this study—including data on the age of entry into the sex trade and PTSD rates among victims—could be disseminated to the public alongside information on the negative psychosocial effects CSEC. Educating the public on the negative effects of CSEC may help community members and policymakers become more sensitized towards victims, and therefore more proactive agents of change.
- **Enhance the provision of trauma-informed mental health services to CSEC victims.** The high rates of probable PTSD among respondents suggest a strong need for high-quality mental health services to supplement other basic services for survivors. While there are governmental and non-governmental organizations offering psychosocial support services locally, the extent to which they are able to provide evidence-based screening, treatment, and aftercare



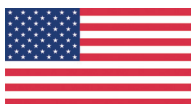
**Sensitize families to
CSEC RISK FACTORS**



**SIGNIFICANTLY EXPAND
trauma informed mental
health services for victims**

to survivors of PTSD is unclear. In addition, service providers should educate caregivers of reintegrated survivors on recognizing and coping with the aftereffects of trauma.

- **Enhance peer-to-peer education for CSEC victims and other at-risk children.** Implement community- and school-based prevention programming with current CSEC victims to help them understand the harmful effects of CSEC to enable them to protect themselves and others. Helping children understand the harmful effects of CSEC may also discourage them from recruiting, and financially benefiting from, other child victims.



This research was funded by a grant from the United States Department of State. The opinions, findings and conclusions stated herein are those of the author[s] and do not necessarily reflect those of the United States Department of State.