

Rethinking Legal Safeguards Against Online Child Sexual Abuse in Nigeria: Addressing Fragmentation and Enforcement Gaps

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Abstract

The rapid evolution of digital technologies, particularly the emergence of the metaverse and social media ecosystems, has expanded access to information and communication while simultaneously exposing children to new forms of online sexual exploitation. This study examines the adequacy of Nigeria's legal and institutional framework in addressing online child sexual abuse, focusing on constitutional safeguards and statutory protections. Adopting a doctrinal legal research approach, the study relies on qualitative analysis of primary legal sources—including international instruments, domestic legislation, and relevant scholarly literature. The findings reveal a significant increase in online child sexual abuse in Nigeria despite the existence of multiple legal instruments and enforcement agencies. Furthermore, the study demonstrates that Nigeria's current framework is fragmented, lacks specialized legislation targeting online exploitation, and is weakened by poor enforcement, evidentiary challenges, and institutional inefficiencies. It argues that the existing legal regime is insufficiently responsive to the evolving, technologically mediated nature of child sexual abuse, thereby undermining effective protection. This research contributes to the literature by providing a context-specific, critical legal analysis of Nigeria's child protection architecture and proposes the need for a coherent, technology-responsive, and enforcement-oriented regulatory framework to enhance child protection and ensure accountability.

[Perkembangan pesat teknologi digital, khususnya kemunculan metaverse dan ekosistem media sosial, telah memperluas akses terhadap informasi dan komunikasi sekaligus meningkatkan kerentanan anak terhadap bentuk-bentuk baru eksploitasi seksual daring. Penelitian ini mengkaji kecukupan kerangka hukum dan kelembagaan di Nigeria dalam

menangani kekerasan seksual anak secara daring, dengan menitikberatkan pada perlindungan konstitusional dan jaminan normatif dalam peraturan perundang-undangan. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan doctrinal legal research dengan analisis kualitatif terhadap sumber hukum primer, termasuk instrumen internasional, peraturan perundang-undangan nasional, serta literatur ilmiah yang relevan. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan adanya peningkatan signifikan kasus kekerasan seksual anak secara daring di Nigeria, meskipun telah terdapat berbagai instrumen hukum dan lembaga penegak hukum yang berwenang. Selain itu, ditemukan bahwa kerangka hukum yang ada masih bersifat terfragmentasi, belum memiliki regulasi khusus yang secara komprehensif mengatur eksploitasi seksual anak secara daring, serta menghadapi kendala dalam penegakan hukum, pembuktian, dan efektivitas kelembagaan. Penelitian ini berargumen bahwa rezim hukum yang berlaku belum responsif terhadap dinamika kekerasan seksual anak yang dimediasi teknologi, sehingga belum mampu memberikan perlindungan yang efektif. Kontribusi penelitian ini terletak pada penyajian analisis hukum yang kritis dan kontekstual terhadap sistem perlindungan anak di Nigeria, serta penekanan pada urgensi pembentukan kerangka regulasi yang lebih koheren, responsif terhadap teknologi, dan berorientasi pada efektivitas penegakan hukum guna meningkatkan perlindungan anak dan menjamin akuntabilitas.]

Keywords: Child Protection Laws, Cybercrime Regulations, Online Child Sexual Abuse, Sextortion, Nigeria.

Introduction

Internet access is now available to more than 50% of the global population, fundamentally transforming patterns of communication, social interaction, and information access. Beyond its practical utility, internet access is increasingly recognized as an emerging human right (Faturoti, 2024). The rapid development of the Internet of Things (IoT) has further redefined the digital landscape, creating a global common that challenges traditional notions of privacy and the boundaries of human rights protection (Al-Billeh, 2024, pp. 3–6). This transformation has culminated in the emergence of the metaverse, a virtual ecosystem that coexists with the physical world and enables immersive human interaction (Park & Kim, 2022, pp. 4212–4215). Within this environment, harmful activities such as sexual exploitation have taken on new dimensions, with effects on victims that are as severe as, if not indistinguishable from, those experienced in physical spaces (Lisi et al., 2025, p. 220). Social media platforms, as tangible manifestations of this digital ecosystem, have become central to the daily lives of children and young people, thereby simultaneously expanding opportunities while exposing them to unprecedented risks.

Children now constitute approximately one-third of global internet users (National Child Traumatic Stress Network, 2025), and their increased online

presence—particularly since the COVID-19 pandemic—has significantly heightened their vulnerability to digital harms. More than 1.5 billion children and adolescents are estimated to have increased their internet usage during this period, correlating with a rise in cyber-enabled abuses, including sexual exploitation (Prasasti, 2021, p. 89). While internet access offers developmental and educational benefits, it has also facilitated various forms of abuse, such as cyberbullying and online sexual exploitation (Putra, 2024, pp. 135–163). Online child sexual abuse encompasses a wide range of conduct, including grooming, exposure to pornographic materials, coercion into sexual activities, and the production and dissemination of exploitative content (World Health Organization [WHO], 2022; Rahman et al., 2025, p. 87). These harms are global in scope and indiscriminate in impact, affecting children across all socioeconomic, racial, and geographic boundaries.

Empirical evidence underscores the severity and scale of this phenomenon. Studies indicate that approximately one in eight children worldwide experience sexual violence, both online and offline, with the rate rising to one in five in parts of Europe (Akinremi, 2024, pp. 37–52). In 2022 alone, 32 million reports of suspected child sexual exploitation were recorded globally, with 99.5% originating from electronic service providers (EMPACT, 2022). The situation is particularly acute in Nigeria, where the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) reports that nearly 70% of children are vulnerable to online sexual exploitation (Haans, 2023; Ifayomi et al., 2023, p. 1119). Similarly, findings from the Disrupting Harm Project reveal that approximately 9% of children aged 12–17 in selected African countries have experienced online sexual abuse (UNICEF South Africa, 2022). These abuses take various forms, including grooming, sexual extortion, and non-consensual image sharing, often facilitated by the borderless nature of digital technologies. The consequences for victims are profound, encompassing long-term psychological trauma, diminished educational outcomes, and impaired social functioning (NSPCC, 2023).

Despite the growing body of scholarship on online child sexual abuse, existing studies have predominantly focused on generalized or jurisdiction-specific analyses outside the Nigerian context. For example, Putra (2024) examines the inadequacies of legal infrastructure in Indonesia, particularly in addressing cyberbullying, while Goni and Efendi (2024) highlight the role of the criminal justice system in combating online sexual exploitation. Although these studies offer valuable insights, they do not sufficiently address the Nigerian legal landscape, nor do they comprehensively engage with the intersection of digital technologies, human rights, and child protection within this jurisdiction. This highlights a critical gap in the literature, particularly regarding the adequacy of Nigeria’s legal and institutional frameworks in addressing emerging forms of online child sexual abuse.

In this context, the article argues that Nigeria's current legal framework is inadequately equipped to address the evolving and technologically mediated nature of online child sexual abuse, thereby necessitating a more coherent, specialized, and enforcement-oriented regulatory approach. The study aims to critically examine the various forms and dynamics of online child sexual abuse, evaluate the adequacy of existing legal and institutional mechanisms in Nigeria, and propose pragmatic reforms to strengthen child protection. By integrating doctrinal legal analysis with comparative perspectives from other jurisdictions, this article contributes to ongoing academic debates on digital rights, child protection, and cybercrime regulation. The article analyzes online abuse typologies, assesses the legal framework, identifies enforcement challenges, and proposes policy recommendations for reform.

Research Methodology

This study adopts a doctrinal legal research approach to examine Nigeria's institutional and legal framework for addressing online child sexual exploitation. The research is qualitative in nature and relies on a library-based methodology, focusing on the systematic analysis of legal principles, statutory provisions, and institutional mechanisms relevant to child protection. The choice of this method is justified by the normative and analytical orientation of the study, which seeks to evaluate the adequacy of existing legal frameworks and to identify structural and doctrinal gaps within Nigeria's child protection regime. The study is situated within the Nigerian legal context, while also drawing on comparative perspectives to situate the analysis within broader international legal developments.

Data for the study are derived from both primary and secondary sources. Primary sources include international treaties, case law, and national legislation, particularly the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria 1999 (as amended) and the Child Rights Act 2003, alongside other relevant statutory instruments. Secondary sources consist of scholarly articles, textbooks, policy reports, and expert commentaries addressing online child sexual abuse within both domestic and international legal frameworks. Data are collected through doctrinal review and desk-based research, including digital databases and online repositories, and are analyzed using qualitative content analysis and comparative legal methods. This analytical framework enables the study to synthesize legal norms, evaluate enforcement challenges, and generate evidence-based recommendations for strengthening Nigeria's response to online child sexual exploitation.

Online Child Sexual Abuse as a Violation of Fundamental Human Rights

Human rights are fundamental and inalienable entitlements inherent to every individual, irrespective of race, color, creed, sex, or origin, and are protected

through international, regional, and domestic legal frameworks. International human rights law imposes tripartite obligations on states—to respect, protect, and fulfill these rights—thereby establishing a comprehensive normative framework for safeguarding human dignity. Within this context, online child sexual abuse constitutes a grave and multifaceted violation of children’s rights, implicating a broad spectrum of entitlements, including civil, political, economic, social, and cultural rights.

The occurrence of online child sexual abuse directly undermines several core rights of the child, including the rights to dignity, liberty, personal security, privacy, freedom from torture or degrading treatment, and the right to health. These rights are protected under international law through the International Bill of Human Rights and domestically under the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria 1999 (CFRN). Complementing this constitutional framework, the Child Rights Act 2003 (CRA) provides a specialized statutory regime for child protection in Nigeria. Notably, Section 3 of the CRA 2003 incorporates the provisions of Chapter IV of the CFRN 1999 into the child protection framework, while also expanding the scope of rights to reflect the particular vulnerabilities and developmental needs of children (Child Rights Act, 2003, §§ 3–20). Although certain rights remain subject to age-based qualifications—such as participation in electoral processes—this does not diminish the state’s overarching obligation to protect children from all forms of abuse, including those facilitated through digital technologies.

At a foundational level, human rights are intrinsically linked to the concept of human dignity, which serves as the normative anchor for all legal protections. Article 34 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC 1989) explicitly mandates that children be protected from all forms of sexual exploitation and abuse, irrespective of the context in which such abuse occurs. This protection extends equally to both online and offline environments. The dissemination of images or content depicting online child sexual abuse constitutes a profound violation of dignity, with far-reaching consequences for the physical and psychological well-being of victims. In recognition of the evolving digital landscape, the Council of Europe has affirmed that human rights protections apply equally to individuals’ online and offline activities. Its Guide to Human Rights for Internet Users (Council of Europe, 2014) articulates key protections, including freedom of expression, access to information, freedom of assembly, protection against cybercrime, the right to private life, and personal data protection.

At the national level, Nigeria has undertaken legislative measures aimed at safeguarding digital rights and adapting human rights protections to the realities of the digital age. The proposed Digital Rights and Freedom Bill seeks to ensure that fundamental rights are not undermined within online environments. More concretely, the Nigeria Data Protection Act 2023 (NDPA) establishes a

comprehensive legal framework for the protection of personal data and privacy, particularly in relation to digital platforms (Aloamaka, 2025). The effectiveness of this framework is further enhanced by the General Application and Implementation Directive 2025 (GAID), which provides detailed guidance on cross-border data transfers and aligns Nigeria's data protection regime with international standards, while also prescribing sanctions for non-compliance (General Application and Implementation Directive, 2025, arts. 2–3). However, notwithstanding these normative and institutional developments, significant gaps remain in the practical enforcement of these rights, particularly in addressing technologically facilitated forms of child sexual abuse. This disconnect between legal guarantees and enforcement realities underscores the urgent need for a more coherent, technology-responsive, and child-centered legal framework capable of effectively addressing the complexities of online sexual exploitation.

Legal and Institutional Framework for Combating Online Child Sexual Abuse in Nigeria

International and Regional Legal Framework

The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), adopted by the United Nations General Assembly on December 16, 1966, provides that every child is entitled to such measures of protection as are required by their status as a minor. These measures are to be ensured by the family, society, and the state without discrimination on grounds such as race, color, sex, language, religion, national or social origin, property, or birth (International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, 1966, art. 24). This provision establishes a shared and multi-layered responsibility for child protection, situating it within both public and private spheres.

Complementing the ICCPR 1966, the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), also adopted in 1966, prohibits the economic and social exploitation of children and mandates that they receive special protection and assistance without discrimination (International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights, 1966). Together, these instruments form part of the International Bill of Human Rights and provide a normative foundation for safeguarding children against exploitation in all its forms, including those facilitated through digital environments.

Building on this foundation, the CRC 1989, adopted in 1989 and entering into force in 1990, represents the principal global instrument dedicated specifically to children's rights. The CRC recognizes children as autonomous rights holders and imposes binding obligations on states to protect them from all forms of violence and exploitation. In particular, Articles 34 and 35 require States to prevent the coercion of children into sexual activities, child prostitution, and the use of children in pornographic materials (Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1989, arts. 34–35). These provisions are especially relevant in the context

of online environments, where such forms of exploitation have become increasingly prevalent and technologically sophisticated. To reinforce these protections, the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution, and Child Pornography, adopted in 2000 and entering into force in 2002, provides detailed definitions of these offenses and requires state parties to criminalize them. It further mandates the provision of support services for affected children and imposes reporting obligations on states to ensure accountability in implementation.

At the regional level, the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR), adopted in 1981 and entering into force in 1986, obligates states to eliminate discrimination and to protect the rights of women and children in accordance with international standards (African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights, 1981, art. 18). However, the broad nature of the ACHPR necessitated the adoption of a more child-specific instrument, leading to the enactment of the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACRWC) in 1990, which entered into force in 1999.

Article 27 of the ACRWC 1990 imposes a clear and affirmative obligation on state parties to protect children from sexual exploitation and abuse. Specifically, states are required to take legislative, administrative, social, and educational measures to prevent (a) the inducement, coercion, or enticement of children into sexual activity; (b) the use of children in commercial sexual exploitation; and (c) the involvement of children in pornographic performances or materials (African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, 1990, art. 27). Complementing these instruments, the African Youth Charter (2006) extends protections to young persons aged 15 to 35 and requires states to enact and enforce laws addressing sexual abuse, exploitation, trafficking, prostitution, and pornography, particularly as they affect girls and young women.

Domestic Legal and Institutional Measures

At the domestic level, the CFRN 1999 serves as the supreme law, providing the legal foundation for all other legislation. It guarantees fundamental rights applicable to all persons—including children—such as the rights to life, dignity, personal liberty, fair hearing, privacy, freedom of thought and religion, expression, assembly, movement, and freedom from discrimination (Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1999, ch. IV; Ehirim, 2024). However, while these provisions establish a broad human rights framework, they do not expressly address child sexual abuse, particularly in its online dimensions, thereby creating a normative gap in responding to contemporary digital threats.

The CRA 2003 was enacted to domesticate the CRC and establish enforceable protections for children within Nigeria. The Act affirms that the best interests of the child shall be the primary consideration in all matters affecting children. Under Part III, it prohibits the importation, publication, or distribution

of materials depicting crime, violence, or obscenity that may adversely affect a child's moral development, including materials disseminated through digital platforms such as the internet, videos, and electronic games (Child Rights Act, 2003, §§ 17–18). While this represents a significant step toward regulating harmful content, its provisions are not sufficiently tailored to address the complexities of technologically mediated sexual exploitation.

The Cybercrimes (Prohibition, Prevention, etc.) Act 2015 establishes a more targeted legal framework for addressing cyber-enabled offenses. Section 23(4) criminalizes online predatory conduct, including sexual solicitation, grooming, and the luring of minors into sexually explicit interactions. The act adopts a broad definition of “child pornography,” encompassing: (a) visual depictions of minors engaged in sexually explicit conduct; (b) representations of persons appearing to be minors in such conduct; and (c) realistic images of minors in such contexts. Consequently, the production, distribution, and transmission of such materials are criminalized. Under Section 23(1), individuals who knowingly use computer systems or networks to produce, distribute, or transmit child pornography are liable to penalties of up to 10 years' imprisonment, a fine of ₦20,000,000, or both (Cybercrimes Act, 2015, § 23(1)). The Act further criminalizes the unsolicited dissemination of pornographic content, including non-consensual sharing via platforms such as WhatsApp and Instagram, with penalties of up to one year's imprisonment, a fine of ₦250,000, or both. These provisions serve as deterrent mechanisms; however, their effectiveness is often constrained by enforcement limitations and technological challenges.

In addition, the Act recognizes that the possession or procurement of child sexual abuse material constitutes exploitation, given that such materials inherently depict real instances of abuse. Accordingly, offenders may face up to five years' imprisonment, a fine of ₦10,000,000, or both for possession or storage with a sexual motive (Cybercrimes Act, 2015, § 23(1)(d)–(e)). The Act also addresses the broader dissemination of obscene or offensive content, prescribing penalties of up to three years' imprisonment, a fine of ₦7,000,000, or both for transmitting such materials through digital systems. Complementing these provisions, the Trafficking in Persons (Prohibition) Enforcement and Administration Act 2015 criminalizes the recruitment, procurement, or use of minors for pornography or sexual performances, as well as the maintenance of children in brothels. Convictions under this Act attract a minimum of seven years' imprisonment and a fine of at least ₦1,000,000, with additional penalties where victims are drugged or incapacitated (Trafficking in Persons Act, 2015, § 17).

Furthermore, Section 170 of the Criminal Code Act criminalizes the transmission of indecent or obscene materials via postal services, classifying such conduct as a misdemeanor punishable by up to one year's imprisonment (Criminal Code Act, § 170). Similarly, the Penal Code (Northern States) Federal Provisions Act regulates the transmission of harmful or obscene materials,

including those posing risks to public safety or undermining public morality, with penalties ranging from imprisonment to fines (Penal Code Act, § 463).

Finally, the NDPA 2023 provides a specialized regulatory framework for the protection of personal data, replacing the earlier Nigeria Data Protection Regulation (NDPR) 2019. The Act mandates compliance by online service providers handling children's personal data and aligns with the constitutional right to privacy under Section 37 of the CFRN 1999, as well as protections under Section 8 of the CRA 2003. It represents a significant advancement in aligning Nigeria's data protection regime with international standards and safeguarding vulnerable populations, particularly children, within the digital ecosystem (Babalola, 2024, p. 1).

Prosecuting Online Child Sexual Offenses: Challenges and Enforcement Realities

Sextortion (financial sexual extortion) has witnessed a dramatic increase, rising from 139 reported cases in 2021 to over 10,000 in 2022. This surge reflects a growing pattern in which perpetrators groom children into sharing explicit content and subsequently extort them for financial gain, thereby transforming digital platforms into instruments of coercion and exploitation. A notable illustration is *United States of America v. Samuel Ogoshi et al.*, in which Samuel Ogoshi, Samson Ogoshi, and Ezekiel Robert were charged with sexual exploitation and attempted exploitation of a minor resulting in death. In this case, the defendants systematically researched victims' personal backgrounds—including school, employment, and family information—through online applications, solicited explicit images, and engaged in sustained extortion. The transnational dimension of the offense is further underscored by the extradition of the Ogoshi brothers to the United States for prosecution (United States Attorney's Office, 2023).

Similarly, on August 29, 2023, Brandon Huu Le (22) was sentenced to 70 months' imprisonment for receiving child pornography in connection with a sextortion scheme conducted via Snapchat. Between August and December 2019, he contacted at least 270 victims and coerced them into sending explicit videos under threat (United States Attorney's Office, 2023). These cases demonstrate not only the scale and sophistication of sextortion networks but also the capacity of jurisdictions with advanced investigative frameworks to prosecute such offenses effectively. By contrast, despite the global surge in sextortion-related crimes, prosecutions in Nigeria remain relatively limited. Although Nigerian law enforcement agencies have issued public warnings and expressed their commitment to addressing such offenses—often in collaboration with other security agencies (Ehirim et al., 2024)—these efforts have yet to translate into a significant number of successful prosecutions.

Enforcement outcomes within Nigeria reveal a pattern of sporadic and largely reactive interventions. For instance, Opara Joan Chizaram was arrested for attempting to blackmail a victim using non-consensual recordings obtained through a dating platform (Akinremi, 2024). In a similar development, the National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons (NAPTIP) reported the arrest of individuals involved in sextortion activities targeting young girls in Abuja (NAPTIP, 2023). While these instances demonstrate that enforcement mechanisms are not entirely absent, they remain insufficient in scale and consistency when compared to the magnitude of the problem.

Furthermore, although Nigerian law provides avenues for criminal liability—such as through provisions relating to defamation and the unlawful dissemination of sexually exploitative material—these legal tools are often indirect and inadequately tailored to the complexities of online child sexual abuse. The reliance on fragmented legal provisions, coupled with limited investigative capacity and challenges in digital evidence gathering, significantly constrains effective prosecution. Consequently, a clear disparity exists between the increasing prevalence of sextortion and the relatively low rate of enforcement, highlighting systemic deficiencies within Nigeria’s legal and institutional response to online child sexual offenses.

Challenges within the Legal and Institutional Framework for Addressing Online Child Sexual Abuse in Nigeria

Nigeria has established a legal framework aimed at protecting children from online sexual abuse and exploitation; however, it remains characterized by significant structural and normative shortcomings. A central challenge lies in the absence of specialized legislation specifically addressing online child sexual abuse. Existing instruments, such as the Criminal Code Act and the Penal Code Act, are inadequate in addressing child pornography and the diverse forms of internet-enabled sexual exploitation of children. Although the Cybercrimes (Prohibition, Prevention, etc.) Act 2015 represents a progressive step—particularly in its provisions on child pornography—it does not comprehensively address emerging forms of abuse within complex digital ecosystems, including the metaverse, as it broadly regulates multiple categories of cybercrime. Consequently, there is a compelling need for targeted and comprehensive legislation, such as a Child Online Protection Act or a Child Privacy Protection Act, to ensure that all forms of online child sexual abuse are clearly defined, effectively prohibited, and adequately penalized.

Notwithstanding the existence of statutes such as the Cybercrimes Act 2015, concerns persist regarding their practical effectiveness. The proliferation of legal instruments has not translated into a corresponding reduction in the incidence of online sexual offenses against children. This disconnect may be attributed, in part, to the lack of reliable and centralized data, as well as the challenges

associated with generating, preserving, and presenting electronic evidence necessary for successful prosecution and informed policymaking. While Nigeria has made some progress in establishing sex offender registries—particularly in states such as Ekiti, Lagos, and Osun—systemic deficiencies remain evident. These include limited nationwide adoption, inconsistencies in data verification, and restricted public accessibility, all of which undermine the effectiveness of such mechanisms. In this regard, there is an urgent need to adopt a more inclusive and evidence-based approach to policymaking by actively involving children and relevant stakeholders. Children can offer valuable insights into digital risks and lived experiences, while institutional actors can ensure that legal frameworks are both practically enforceable and responsive to evolving technological realities.

Although the CRA 2003 was enacted to provide comprehensive protection for children, its implementation across Nigeria has encountered considerable challenges. Initially, only 22 states adopted the Act, with several northern states resisting its domestication on the grounds of perceived incompatibility with religious and cultural norms—particularly in relation to child marriage, freedom of religion, and guardianship practices such as *kafālah* (surety). By 2023, all states had formally adopted the CRA 2003, with some jurisdictions revising their laws to harmonize religious practices with federal standards. Nevertheless, enforcement remains uneven due to Nigeria’s plural legal system, which accommodates customary and religious norms that may conflict with statutory provisions, especially regarding the definition and regulation of child marriage. This inconsistency weakens the uniform application of child protection laws and creates vulnerabilities that may be exploited in the context of online abuse.

A further and equally critical challenge lies in the absence of a comprehensive, victim-centered remedial framework. Nigerian laws addressing child sexual abuse predominantly emphasize punitive measures—such as imprisonment and fines—while paying insufficient attention to the rehabilitation, recovery, and reintegration of victims. Existing legal provisions inadequately provide for essential support services, including psychological counseling, medical care, legal assistance, and social reintegration. As a result, many survivors are left without the institutional support necessary for meaningful recovery. This deficiency is compounded by the lack of effective coordination among relevant enforcement agencies. Key institutions—including the Nigeria Police Force, the National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons (NAPTIP), and the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC)—often operate in institutional silos, resulting in fragmented investigations, duplication of roles, and diminished overall effectiveness.

There is therefore a pressing need for an integrated, multi-agency approach involving all stakeholders within the child protection ecosystem. These include the Federal Ministry of Women Affairs and Social Development, the Federal

Ministry of Justice, the Special Presidential Committee on Human Trafficking, Child Labor and Slavery, as well as civil society organizations such as the Child's Rights and Rehabilitation Network, the International Federation of Women Lawyers (FIDA), the National Council for Child's Rights Advocates of Nigeria (NACCARAN), and the UNICEF, among others (Akinremi, 2024, pp. 37–52). Such collaboration is essential not only for effective enforcement but also for ensuring a holistic response that integrates prevention, protection, and rehabilitation.

The duplication of roles among governmental agencies—exacerbated by the absence of clearly defined institutional mandates—further undermines effective child protection in Nigeria. Bureaucratic inefficiencies, often attributed to inadequate funding, continue to impede the operational capacity of key agencies. Institutions such as NAPTIP and state-level child protection bodies receive insufficient budgetary allocations, while non-governmental organizations remain heavily dependent on short-term donor funding. Additionally, many child protection agencies are understaffed, and existing personnel frequently lack specialized expertise in critical areas such as trauma-informed care, digital forensics, child psychology, and legal procedures. These deficiencies contribute to delays in case handling and inconsistencies in victim support.

The situation is further aggravated by the absence of centralized and accessible reporting mechanisms. Existing platforms—such as NAPTIP's hotline and the Nigeria Internet Registration Association (NIRA) reporting system—remain fragmented, with no unified national system for reporting and responding to online child sexual abuse. This fragmentation significantly limits Nigeria's capacity to detect, investigate, and remove child sexual abuse material in a timely and effective manner. Consequently, the cumulative effect of these structural, institutional, and normative deficiencies underscores a critical gap between Nigeria's legal commitments and its practical ability to address the evolving realities of online child sexual abuse.

Conclusion

This study has demonstrated that, although children are entitled to robust protection under international and domestic human rights frameworks, the rapid evolution of digital technologies has significantly intensified their exposure to online sexual exploitation. The findings reveal that Nigeria's existing legal and institutional framework remains inadequate in addressing this emerging threat, particularly due to the absence of specialized legislation targeting online child sexual abuse and the fragmented incorporation of related offenses within broader statutory regimes. Furthermore, persistent challenges relating to weak enforcement, limited prosecutorial success, evidentiary constraints, and institutional fragmentation have undermined the effectiveness of existing legal measures. By situating these deficiencies within both normative and practical contexts, this article contributes to the growing body of legal scholarship on

technology-facilitated abuse by offering a critical, jurisdiction-specific analysis of Nigeria's child protection architecture and highlighting the disconnect between legal commitments and enforcement realities.

In response, this study underscores the urgent need for a more coherent, coordinated, and technology-responsive legal framework. This includes the enactment of specialized legislation on online child protection, the harmonization of existing laws such as the Child Rights Act 2003, the Cybercrimes Act 2015, and the Criminal and Penal Codes, and the establishment of standardized mechanisms such as a nationwide sex offender registry and centralized reporting systems. Equally important is the strengthening of institutional capacity through sustained funding, inter-agency collaboration, and specialized training in areas such as digital forensics, trauma-informed care, and child protection law. While these recommendations offer a pathway toward improved legal and policy responses, the study is limited by its reliance on doctrinal and qualitative analysis, thereby necessitating further empirical research to assess the effectiveness of proposed reforms and to measure the evolving patterns of online child sexual abuse in Nigeria.

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