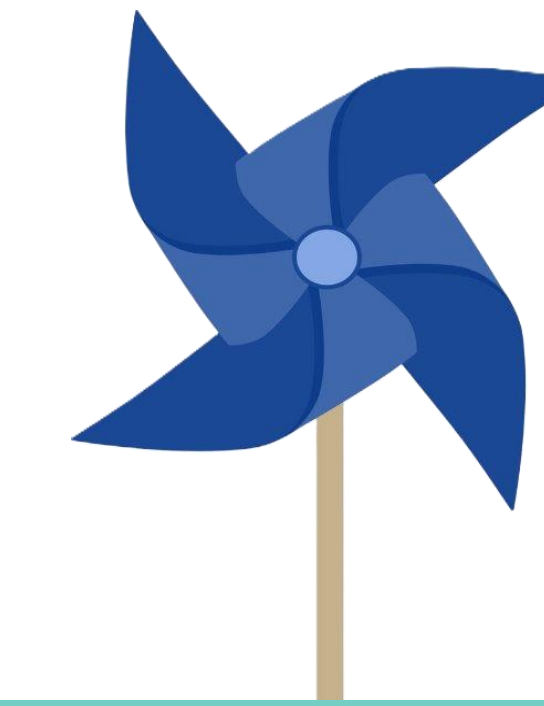
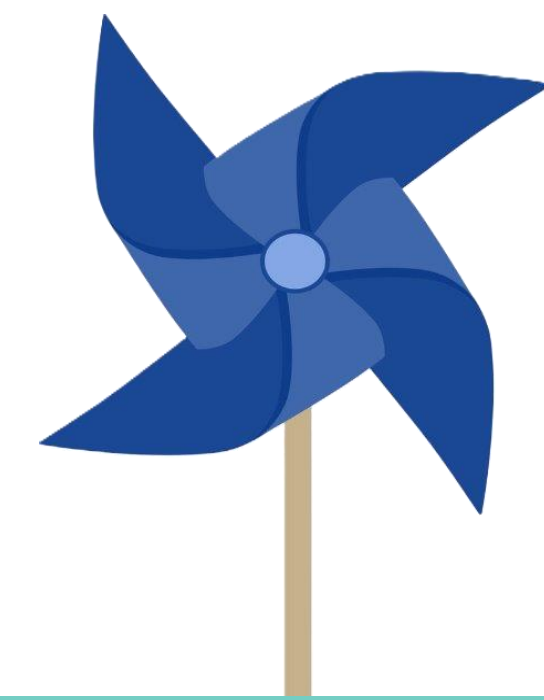


# Assessment of Current Online Sexual Child Abuse Research

Charlotte Fry, BSPH May 2025  
Lindenwood University, St. Charles, MO



## Introduction

As the virtual world continues to expand, **Online Sexual Child Abuse (OSCA)** is becoming an increasingly urgent issue, with various forms of technological exploitation, such as nonconsensual image misuse and coerced image recruitment, emerging as methods of harm.<sup>1</sup> Victims of OSCA often delay disclosure, sometimes not coming forward until years later.<sup>2</sup> This delay is often due to fear of the offender discovering the disclosure, feelings of shame, or the belief that the abuse was not severe enough.<sup>2</sup>

Because of underreporting, accurately determining prevalence rates and dynamics of OSCA and exploitation is challenging.

## Risk Factors

- **Children as young as 8 are at risk**, with online sexual victimization peaking between ages 12–14; different offense types require tailored prevention strategies.<sup>2</sup>
- **Risk is influenced by multiple factors**, including developmental stage, gender, mental health, parent-child dynamics, and online access—girls and LGBT+ youth are especially vulnerable.<sup>3</sup>
- **A Turkish study of 1,501 cases**, 14.1% involved online sexual abuse; 92.3% of victims were girls, and Instagram was the most frequently used platform.<sup>4</sup>

## Negative Health Outcomes

- **Victims report immediate emotional impacts**, including isolation, self-blame, shame, and self-harm—often affecting their relationships with family and peers.<sup>2</sup>
- **Long-term effects include difficulties with trust**, particularly in friendships and romantic relationships, with many fearing future abuse and struggling to build connections.<sup>2</sup>
- **Survivors linked their abuse to lasting mental health issues**, including anxiety, OCD, PTSD symptoms, and even psychosis, often fueled by ongoing feelings of self-blame.<sup>2</sup>

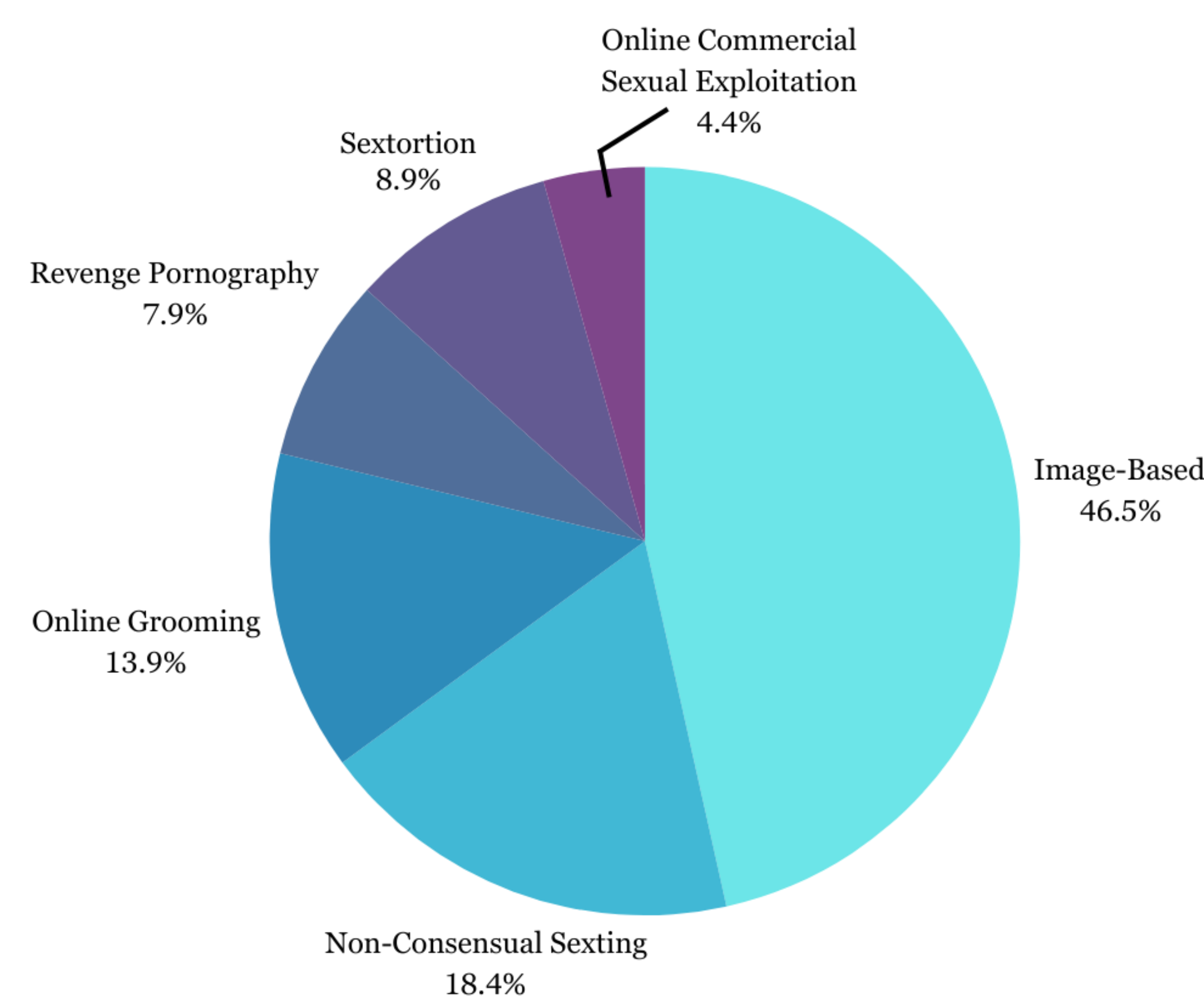
## Scope of the Problem

Research on prevalence and dynamics of offenses remain limited in the United States, with most studies occurring out of the states, however one survey from the University of New Hampshire found:<sup>1,5</sup>

- **16% of young adults in the U.S. reported experiencing at least one form of OSCA before turning 18. (Total of 2639 survey participants)**<sup>5</sup>
- The overall prevalence rates are recorded in the table<sup>1</sup>

Dynamics	Prevalence Rate
Online Sexual Child Abuse (Overall)	15.6%
Image-Based	18.2%
Non-Consensual Sexting	7.2%
Online Grooming by an Adult	5.4%
Revenge Pornography	3.1%
Sextortion	3.5%
Online-Commercial Sexual Exploitation	1.7%

- Percentage of types of OSCA from the survey<sup>1</sup>



## Conclusion

- In-depth research into this problem highlights the need for further investigation into OSCA's prevalence, the methods perpetrators use to target victims, the social, emotional, and physical impact on survivors, and the barriers that prevent disclosure and reporting.
- **Investing into OSCA research will help support:**
  - **Efforts to strengthen prevention and intervention programs**
  - **Increase online platform accountability**
  - **Enhance survivor-centered care**

## Sources

1. Finkelhor D, Turner H, Colburn D. Prevalence of online sexual offenses against children in the US. JAMA network open. October 3, 2022. Accessed March 17, 2025. <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC9568794/>.
2. Schmidt F, Varese F, Bucci S. Understanding the prolonged impact of online sexual abuse occurring in childhood. Frontiers in psychology. October 24, 2023. Accessed March 17, 2025. <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC10627921/#sec1>.
3. Hornor G, Billa A, Daniels A, et al. Online sexual solicitation of children and adolescents in a high-risk population. Journal of pediatric health care : official publication of National Association of Pediatric Nurse Associates & Practitioners. May 27, 2022. Accessed March 17, 2025. <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/35644705/>.
4. Tanager MT, Oksal H, Buber O. Risk Factors and predictors of Penetrative Online Child Sexual Abuse. 2025. Accessed March 18, 2025. [https://www.jpmedh.org/article/S0891-5245\(21\)00126-7/fulltext](https://www.jpmedh.org/article/S0891-5245(21)00126-7/fulltext).
5. Cybercrime module 12 key issues: Online child sexual exploitation and abuse. United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. Accessed March 17, 2025. <https://sherloc.unodc.org/cld/en/education/tertiary/cybercrime/module-12/key-issues/online-child-sexual-exploitation-and-abuse.html>.