

Combating Online Child Sexual Exploitation and Abuse in Sri Lanka: Towards a Statutory Response

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Abstract

The pervasive nature of the internet has facilitated a significant increase in online child sexual exploitation and abuse worldwide. Since the transnational aspect of these crimes poses a challenge for law enforcement agencies, a global concern has arisen from the imperative to protect children from harmful experiences and support survivors. This concern is also relevant to Sri Lanka, prompting the need to assess the adequacy of the country's legal framework. This research aims to determine whether Sri Lanka possesses an adequate legal framework to combat online child sexual exploitation and abuse. This involves identifying the definition and scope of the offence, reviewing domestic and international legal standards, analysing lacunas in domestic law, and proposing recommendations to address those lacunas. A desk review of primary and secondary resources, including international legal instruments such as the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Optional Protocol on the Sale of Children, Child Pornography, and Prostitution, the Lanzarote Convention, and the Budapest Convention, as well as domestic legal provisions in the Penal Code and the Computer Crimes Act, was conducted. The study revealed that Sri Lanka currently lacks an adequate legal framework to combat online child sexual exploitation and abuse effectively. There is no specific legislation directly addressing this offence. Hence, Sri Lanka should enhance its efforts to implement new legislation targeting online child sexual exploitation and abuse. Only then can Sri Lanka make significant progress in the fight against online child sexual exploitation and abuse, fulfilling its obligations to protect the rights of its children.

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