

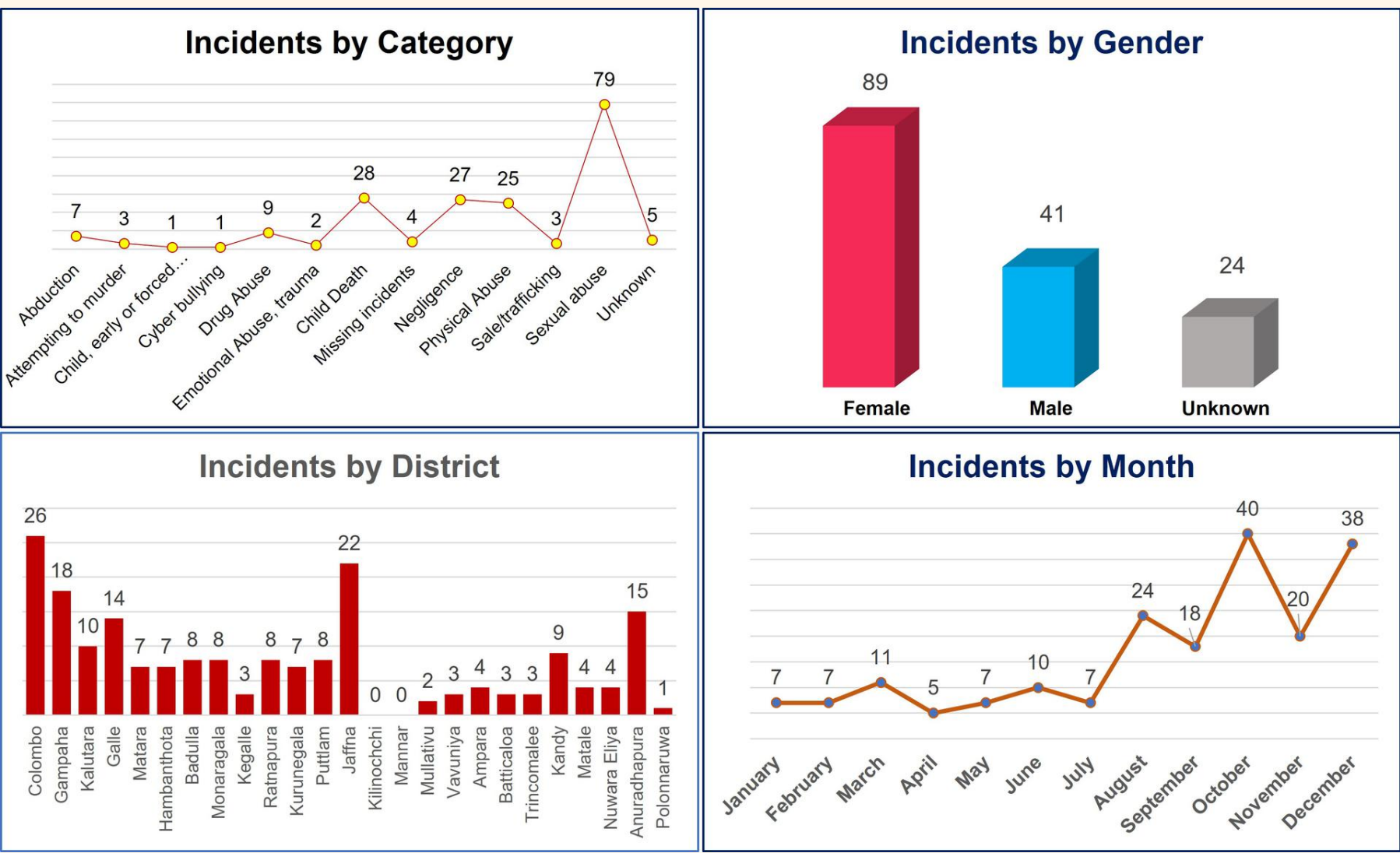
# Child Abuse Incidents

## Reported in Media for Year 2022



As our work is directly impacted by child abuse, we have been closely monitoring trusted and reliable media on incidence reports of child abuse since 2013.

At the outset, our intention was to monitor and document the incidence of child abuse and sexual exploitation, i.e. the nature of abuse and the geographical locations of the highest rates of incidence so we may strategize our programming.



In the ensuing months, we will be analyzing different trends to research child abuse and document them. We trust that in this process we will also provide our stakeholders and child rights activists credible information and insight into child abuse in Sri Lanka.

The below graphs and corresponding trend analyses are the outcome of our monitoring media for year 2022 which provide a wealth of information for us and our stakeholders in our work on preventing child sexual abuse.



### TYPES OF ABUSE AS REPORTED BY MEDIA

While the four main types of child abuse are physical abuse, emotional abuse, neglect, and sexual abuse we compiled all reported child abuse incidents under 13 types of grave child abuse categories as indicated by the graphs above.

In the graph above, from all reported incidences of child abuse cases *sexual abuse* is 41 per cent, the highest occurring crime against children in 2022.

According to our graph, other child abuse incidence that is high is child deaths at 14 per cent (28 incidences). Of the 28 instances of child deaths 75 per cent (21 incidences) were homicide and 14 per cent (4 incidences) were suicide.

One (1 child) died due to medical negligence of state medical services, while 7 per cent (2 children) were sexually abused and murdered. The other abuses were negligence at 14 per cent and physical abuse at 13 per cent.

The World Health Organization (WHO) defines child abuse and child maltreatment as "all forms of physical and/or emotional ill-treatment, sexual abuse, neglect or negligent treatment or commercial or other exploitation, resulting in actual or potential harm to the child's health, survival, development or dignity in the context of a relationship of responsibility, trust or power."

### INCIDENCE OF CHILD ABUSE BY MONTH

The months of October and December saw an unusual increase in the incidence of child abuse with 40 incidents in October and 38 incidents in December. The months preceding October, August and September, saw a spike with 21 and 18 media reported incidents consecutively for those months.

One possible reason for this sudden increase in incidents may have been the media's preoccupation with coverage of the country's economic crisis and the national protests against the government in the earlier part of the year, specifically between April and July. As a result, only partial coverage of child abuse incidents may have been reported during those challenging months.

Another possibility for the sudden increase is a possible correlation between the escalating cases of child abuse and the worsening severity of the country's economic crisis. One manifestation of this correlation is that due to most families being unable to afford basic, nutritious, and high quality food items parents are heavily preoccupied, distracted and even disengaged in child rearing, neglecting to sustain watchful and protective scrutiny over their children, thereby resulting in a higher average of incidence of child abuse for the above months.

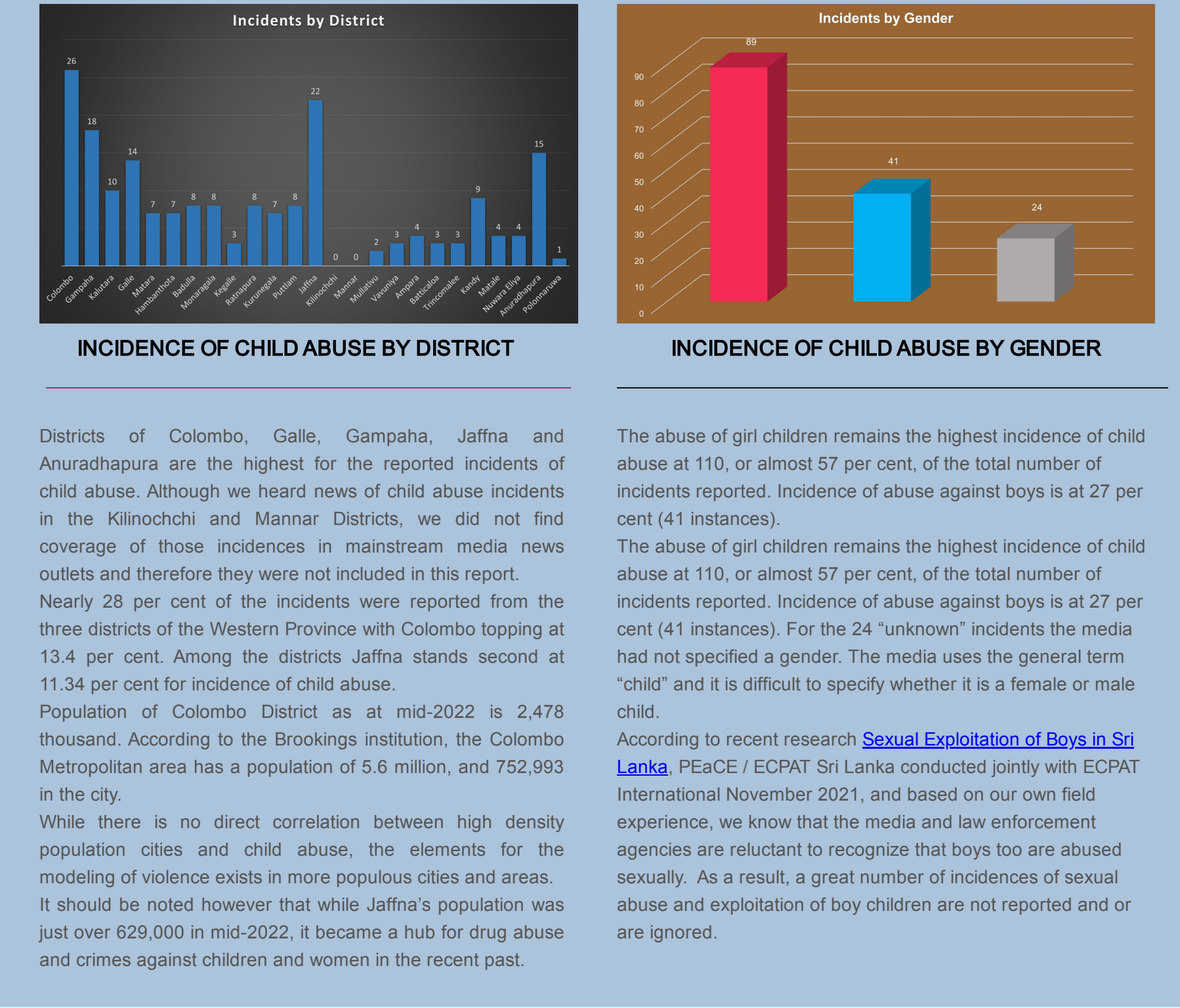
No specific causes may be definitively identified at this time for the significant increases in the incidence of child abuse for October and December.

Certainly, a comparative graph analysis of incidence reports by month for 2021 to that of 2022 would undoubtedly provide further information for analysis.

## CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE

Child sexual abuse does not relate only to abuse incidents of penal penetration; it also entails incidents of touching, non-penetrative acts (such as kissing, rubbing and touching outside clothing). They may also include non-contact activities, such as involving children in looking at, or in the production of, sexual images, watching sexual activities, encouraging children to behave in sexually inappropriate ways, or grooming a child in preparation for abuse including via the internet.

According to the Sri Lanka Police, 1,500 rape cases including statutory rapes were reported in the first nine months of 2022, a significant increase from the first nine months of 2021. Of the 1,500 reported, over 13 per cent rapes were perpetrated on women (persons over the age of 18) whereas 86.6 per cent were statutory rapes.



### INCIDENCE OF CHILD ABUSE BY DISTRICT

Districts of Colombo, Galle, Gampaha, Jaffna and Anuradhapura are the highest for the reported incidents of child abuse. Although we heard news of child abuse incidents in the Kilinochchi and Mannar Districts, we did not find coverage of those incidences in mainstream media news outlets and therefore they were not included in this report.

Nearly 28 per cent of the incidents were reported from the three districts of the Western Province with Colombo topping at 13.4 per cent. Among the districts Jaffna stands second at 11.34 per cent for incidence of child abuse.

Population of Colombo District as at mid-2022 is 2,478 thousand. According to the Brookings institution, the Colombo Metropolitan area has a population of 5.6 million, and 752,993 in the city.

While there is no direct correlation between high density population cities and child abuse, the elements for the modeling of violence exists in more populous cities and areas. It should be noted however that while Jaffna's population was just over 629,000 in mid-2022, it became a hub for drug abuse and crimes against children and women in the recent past.

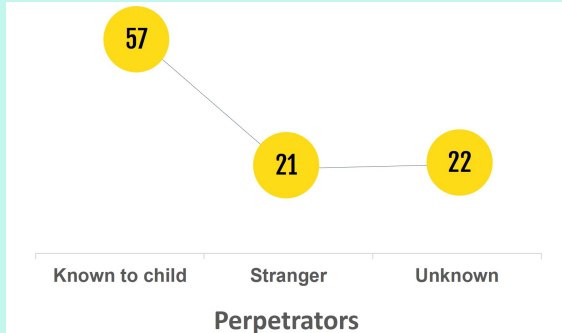
### INCIDENCE OF CHILD ABUSE BY GENDER

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According to recent research [Sexual Exploitation of Boys in Sri Lanka](#), PEACE / ECPAT Sri Lanka conducted jointly with ECPAT International November 2021, and based on our own field experience, we know that the media and law enforcement agencies are reluctant to recognize that boys too are abused sexually. As a result, a great number of incidences of sexual abuse and exploitation of boy children are not reported and or are ignored.

### PERPETRATOR



According to research 95 per cent of perpetrators who engaged in sexual abuse of children were known to the victim and usually a part of the child's close or extended family. According to the media reports 57 per cent of the offenders are either family members or closely associated to the family. Only 21 per cent are strangers while 22 per cent remain unknown.

Between October and December 2022, a high number of child abuse occurrences at the hands of educators have been reported by the media; school principals and schoolteachers of both sexes have been remanded following brutal corporal punishments meted to students. Educational institutes and teachers fail to comprehend that school children are rights holders and as a result are non-compliant with the UNCRC.

### Online Child Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (OCSEA), and Media

We notice that only one media report about cyber bullying was reported in 2022.

Of course, this does not mean that OCSEA is non-existent. In fact, between 2021- 2022, there were two heavily publicized cases where the victims, 15-year old female children, were trafficked online and prostituted.

According to the Bureau for the Prevention of Abuse of Children and Women, 17,629 Child Sexual Abuse Materials (CSAM) have been uploaded on the Internet from Sri Lankan IP addresses between June 17 and July 26, 2021. These CSAM include child pornographic videos and images of Sri Lankan children and children from abroad.

The noticeable lack of media reporting on what is actually a prevalent issue, points to an unfamiliarity on the part of media sources, and law enforcement, in accurate knowledge and reporting practices on OCSEA as well as its manifestations online for children and adolescents / teens.

The same could be stated for our legal system. For example, in regard to the cases above, to date, no further actions have been taken by the Attorney-General's office in prosecuting those arrested and who have since been granted bail. It has been widely speculated that the reason for this lack of action may be due to heavy political influence as a former Maldivian Minister, professionals and a well-known, Buddhist monk in Sri Lanka are allegedly implicated.

In 2019, PEACE-ECPAT Sri Lanka commissioned Verité Research to conduct a [Legal Gap Analysis on Online Child Sexual Exploitation and Abuse in Sri Lanka](#). According to the analysis, they found "...currently a lack of knowledge on what constitutes OCSEA."

They recommended training for NCPA, CD, CiD, Prosecutors and Judges, in fact for all law enforcement on recognizing / identifying what constitutes OCSEA.

### Let's end child abuse

In a recent press release titled *Child Welfare and Child Justice in Sri Lanka – No time like the present*, UNICEF stated that while competent authorities exist for child protection in Sri Lanka nevertheless a key issue was a lack of coordination between the protection agencies. Specifically, the National Child Protection Authority, the Department of Probation and Child Care Services, the National Secretariat for Early Childhood Development, and the Bureau for the Prevention of Abuse of Children and Women under the Police do not have a mechanism to come together to discuss child protection priorities.

We hope therefore that sharing information of Child Abuse will provide stakeholders in Child Protection the scope for acting in conjunction in the prevention of Child Abuse.

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We welcome your comments and feedback to improve our documentation



PEACE (Protecting Environment and Children Everywhere)  
ECPAT Sri Lanka  
39/4, Jayasinghe Road  
Colombo 00600  
Sri Lanka

