

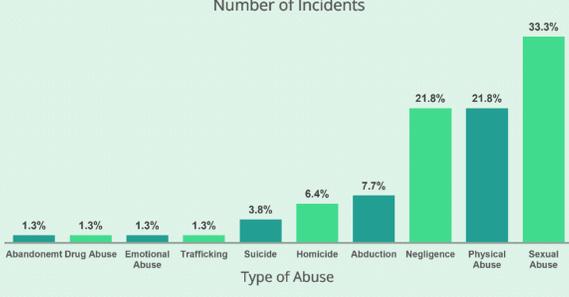
Child Abuse Incidents Reported in Media for April 2023

In April 2023, Sri Lanka witnessed 65 reported incidents of child abuse, involving 78 child victims (some incidents had multiple victims and/or perpetrators). Among the victims, 54% were female, 40% were male, and 6% were unspecified. A significant portion 47% of the abusers were acquaintances of the child but not related to them. Among the districts, Matara had the highest reported rate of child abuse at 9%, followed by Kalutara, Monaragala, and Ratnapura districts, each at 7.7%.

The most prevalent form of violence against children was sexual abuse, accounting for 33.3% of the reported incidents, followed by physical abuse and neglect at 21.8% each. Disturbingly, there was an increase in negligence by primary school caregivers in April, leading to nearly 40 school children suffering from food poisoning. It is important to understand the factors contributing to such negligence to prevent future incidents.

Tragically, April also marked the mysterious death of a 16-year-old schoolgirl. She jumped naked from the third floor of a motel building, resulting in her death. Further details surrounding this incident are still being investigated.

Child Abuse Categories

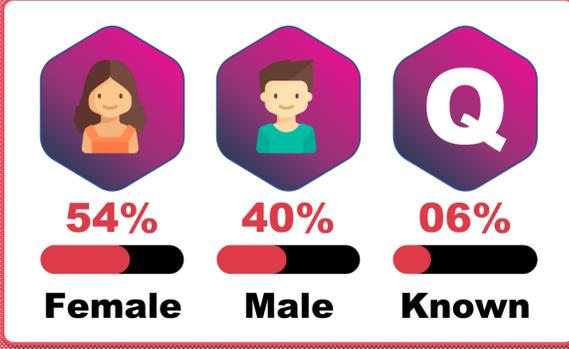


The statistics provided for April 2023 shows 65 reported incidents of child abuse that sexual abuse is once again the most common form of abuse, accounting for (33.3%) of all incidents reported. In a few cases multiple perpetrators involved in the violation. Neglect and physical abuse follow closely behind at (21.8%) each. Abduction and Homicide also continue to be a significant concern, with 6 and 4 cases respectively. There were comparatively fewer instances of drug abuse, emotional abuse, and trafficking, with only 1 case each. Suicide accounted for (2.6%) of reported cases.



Out of the 78 victims involved in 65 child abuse incidents that were reported in April, 26 victims (33%) of them experienced sexual abuse, which was the highest percentage of any category. Physical Abuse and Negligence come next with 17 victims (22%) each followed by 6 Abductions and 5 Homicides. Overall, the data shows that victims of Sexual Abuse, Physical Abuse and Negligence account for 60% of all cases.

Victims by Gender



Data from the media monitoring team shows that in April 2023, females made up the majority of the reported child abuse victims, with 42 (54%) of them, 31 (40%) males, and 5 (6%) unspecified. This indicates that girls are more vulnerable to abuse than boys, with a significantly higher number of female victims. Yet the majority of victims of negligence cases were male children at 70%.

Age Group of Victims

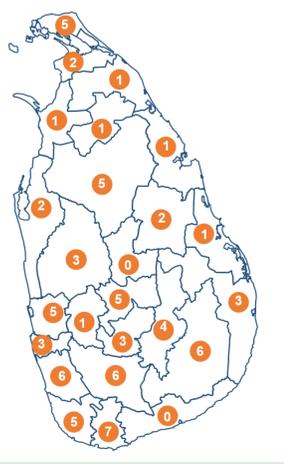


Children between the ages of 15 and 18 account for the highest percentage of child abuse victims, comprising 43.6% of all victims. The second most targeted age range is between 10 and 14 years old, comprising 23.1% of victims. Sexual abuse is the most common form of abuse in these two age groups, with 41.2% of victims aged 15-18 and 38.9% of victims aged 10-14 being subjected to sexual abuse.

Children aged 6 to 10 years old make up 12.8% of victims, while children under the age of 5 years old account for 7.7% of victims. Infants and toddlers under the age of one make up 5.1% of all victims, indicating that even the youngest children are not immune to abuse.

It is important to note that 7.7% of the victims fall under an unspecified age group, which highlights the need for more accurate data collection and reporting.

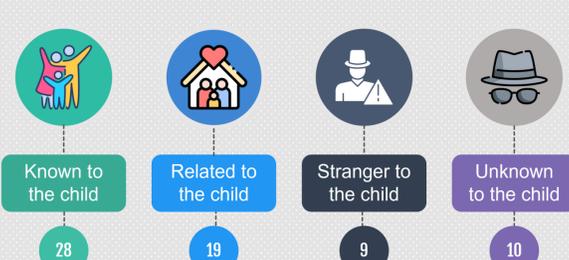
Geographic Distribution



The data for reported cases of child abuse in Sri Lanka for the month of April 2023 has been collected and analyzed. The district with the highest reported rate of child abuse is Matara at 9%, followed closely by Kalutara, Monaragala, and Ratnapura districts with rates of 7.7%. Meanwhile, districts such as Batticaloa and Trincomalee have the lowest reported rates of child abuse, with each reporting only one case in the month of April.

However, it is important to note that this data only represents reported cases and does not account for the actual number of child abuse incidents that occur. Many cases still go unreported due to a lack of awareness and understanding of the issue, as well as fear and shame among victims. This highlights the need for greater efforts to increase awareness about child abuse and create a safe environment for victims to report abusive situations.

Child Abusers



Based on the reported incidents of child abuse in the month of April, we can see that the total number of incidents reported in the media was 65, with 66 perpetrators involved. Out of the 66 perpetrators, 31 were known to the child and 28 were related. From this data, we can infer that the majority of abusers (47%) are not related to the child but known to them, whether they are close to the victim or not. 2 (3.0%) of the abusers were unknown to the child while 5 (7.6%) of the abusers were strangers to the child.

The data for the month of April reinforces the findings of previous reports, which suggest that the majority of abusers are not strangers but rather individuals who are known to the child.

Negligence of the Most Vulnerable

In April, there were two incidents that impacted a vulnerable group of children, aged between 5 and 3 years old. These incidents involved food poisoning while in the care of their respective primary schools and nurseries, resulting in 39 children being hospitalized. It is alarming to note that the caregivers failed to take necessary precautionary measures such as food testing and maintaining high standards of food quality. The educational ministries must take responsibility for ensuring that both private and government primary institutions take measures to prevent such incidents from occurring in the future. It is the government's responsibility to ensure the well-being of its most important and vulnerable citizens.



The Tragic Death of a 16-Year-Old School Girl

The whole nation was left in shock when the body of 16-year-old schoolgirl Shehani was discovered near railway tracks in Kalutara on 6th May. Reports revealed that Shehani had taken a fatal fall from the third floor of a nearby five-story building, which is reportedly used for leisure accommodation. An investigation into the mystery surrounding Shehani's death revealed a sorrowful story with three young people associated with the tragedy, all of whom have been identified as suspects in the case. The primary suspect is 29-year-old Sumith, while the other two suspects are Shehani's 19-year-old friend Amalka and Amalka's 22-year-old boyfriend Ruwan.

Investigations have uncovered a worrying pattern of events surrounding the suspicious case. Reports have suggested that Ruwan helped arrange a meeting between Shehani and Sumith, who was allegedly paying Ruwan a sum of rupees 20,000 for his services, with an advanced payment of 12,000 deposited in his bank account. Sumith has confessed to visiting the building on May 6th with Ruwan and Amalka, where all four had rented two rooms on the third floor. He has also admitted that they had been drinking alcohol. Moreover, it appears that this was the first time Sumith had met Shehani, with Ruwan's introductions being the link.

The tragedy of what happened in the hotel between those involved has left an innocent teenage schoolgirl dead. Unfortunately, incidents such as these, have become too familiar. But have we truly learned any lessons from the lives that have been lost? It is a million-dollar question to ask. The sexual exploitation of children is a blight on our society that goes relatively unnoticed by parents, institutions and law enforcement. We all have a duty to ensure the safety and innocence of our children, and doing so requires accountability and a proactive effort to prevent such heinous crimes against children.

As a result of this heart-breaking case, the government has announced the introduction of new laws to protect children from sexual abuse. Sadly, this is not the first such occurrence, where only after a child has sacrificed her life to a sexual predator do the rulers take notice. Nevertheless, we appreciate the government's decisive action in strengthening the law in order to protect young lives. However, this legal action should not be limited to law books. It must be supplemented by a multi-faceted action plan, with the government, civil society and law enforcement shouldering the responsibility of protecting children from sexual exploitation.

To effect this, an atmosphere of greater awareness should be created amongst people of all ages and walks of life – school children, teachers, parents, legal guardians, private corporations and government organizations should all be educated on the issue at hand and encouraged to play a role in creating a safe environment for the young. Only through such concerted collective action can we ensure the implementation and enforcement of these laws.

(In order to maintain people's privacy, their real names were not disclosed).