



Child Abuse Incidents Reported in Media for July 2023

This information is the result of the aggregation and verification of reported cases of violence against children in the media for the month of July 2023. Since January 2023, PEaCE/ECPAT Sri Lanka have been sharing similar information in the form of a monthly newsletter with a range of stakeholders. We believe that sharing the information with a wider audience is to everyone's benefit.

In July 2023, Sri Lanka witnessed 90 incidents involving 107 perpetrators and 108 victims of child abuse reported in the media.

Among these cases, 57% affected female children, 40% impacted male children, and the remaining 3% were unspecified in gender.

The highest affected age group was teenagers aged 15-18 years, accounting for 36% of the total incidents.

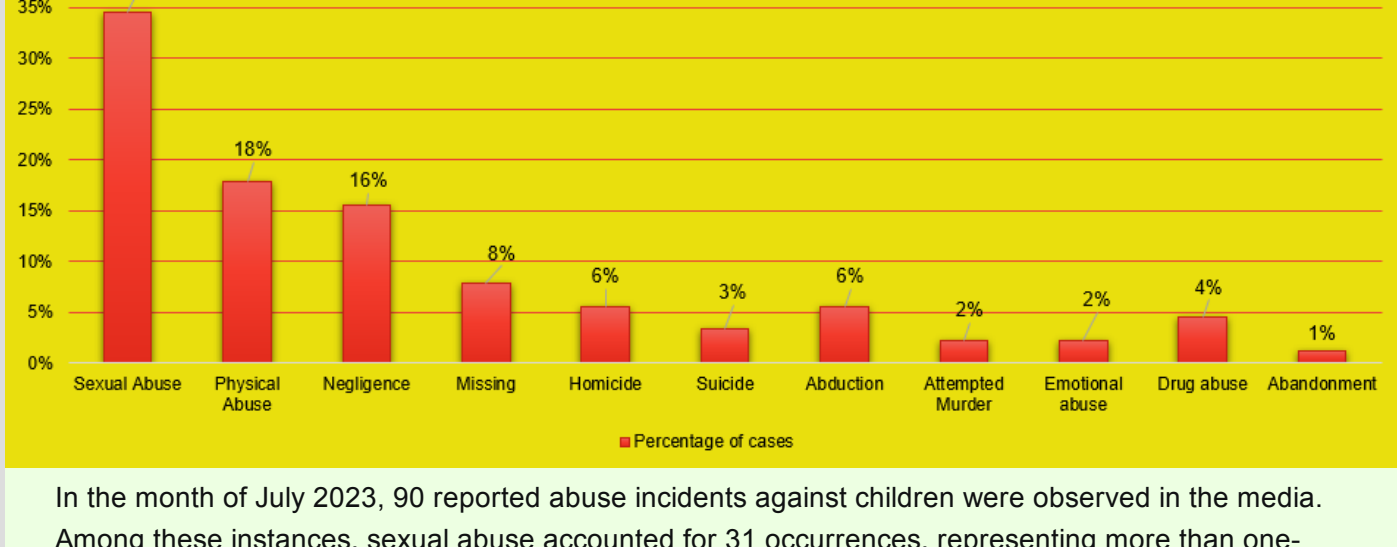
Kurunegala emerged with the highest number of reported cases, accounting for 14% of the total reported cases.

In our observation, we noted several critical cases

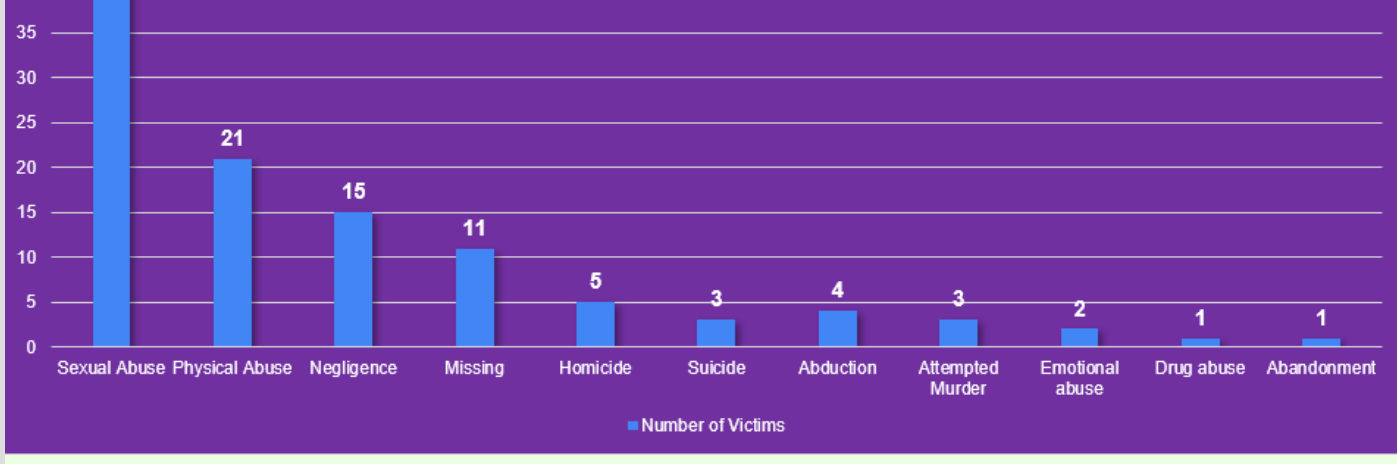
- Drug dealers targeting school children
- A significant number of child suicides
- Monks sexually abusing children
- Sexual exploitation of school boys
- Fathers sexually abusing children
- Physical violence by school teachers and principals against students
- Several accidents impacting children

Keep reading to find out more.

Categories of Child Abuse

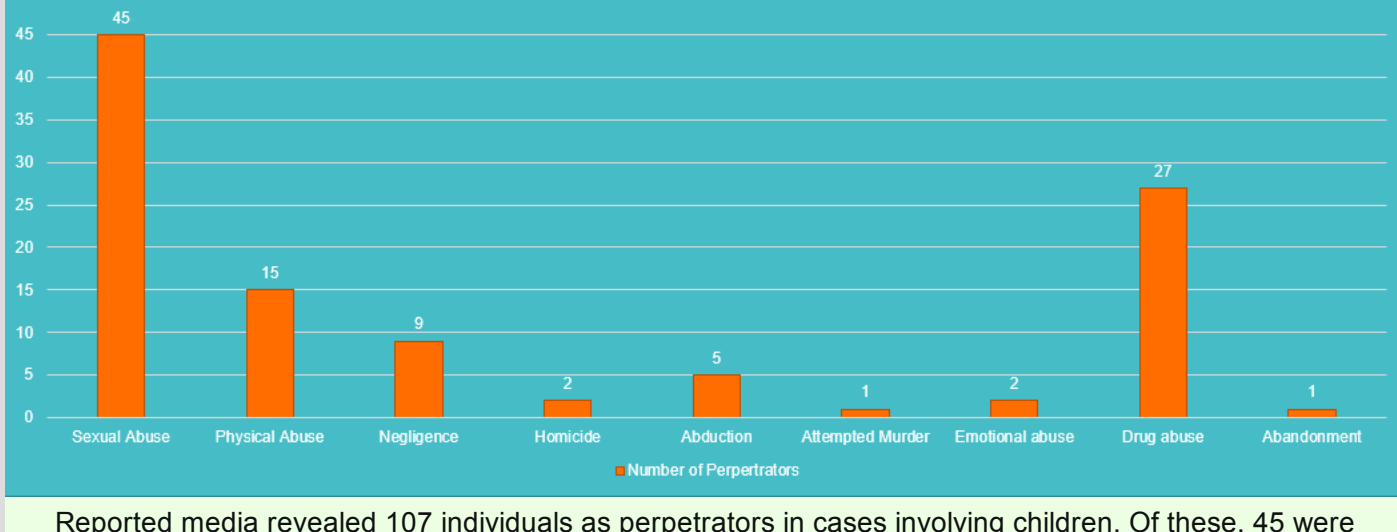


In the month of July 2023, 90 reported abuse incidents against children were observed in the media. Among these instances, sexual abuse accounted for 31 occurrences, representing more than one-third of the violence experienced. Additionally, there were 16 cases of physical abuse and 14 cases of negligence reported. Combined, these three types of abuse make up nearly 70% of the total reported cases against children in July 2023. It is noted that there has been an increase in reports of missing children (7 cases) and abduction (5 cases) compared to the previous months. One incident of sexual abuse was paired with abduction. There were a total of 5 homicides, with 2 of them being death by hanging. There were 3 suicides and 2 attempted murders. The media also reported 3 cases of drug abuse and a single case of child abandonment.



A total of 108 child victims of violence were reported in news coverage the past month. Among these, sexual abuse was the most prevalent form of abuse, affecting 42 minors. Additionally, 21 children were victims of physical abuse, while 15 faced neglect. 11 missing children were reported in the media with 5 homicide victims, 3 suicides, 4 abductees, 3 victims of attempted murders, 2 instances of emotional abuse, and 1 child affected by drug abuse cases with 1 child being abandoned.

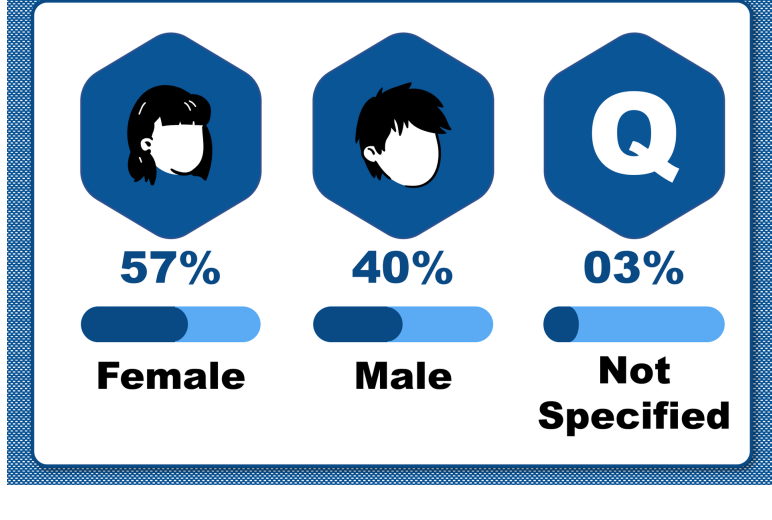
3 of the missing individuals were found during the same month. In one abduction case, the child managed to escape independently, showing incredible resilience.



Reported media revealed 107 individuals as perpetrators in cases involving children. Of these, 45 were accountable for sexual abuse, 15 were found responsible for physical abuse, and 9 adults responsible for negligence. The month also witnessed 2 attemptees of homicides, 5 abductors, 1 attempted murderer, 2 emotional abusers, and 1 case of an abandoning parent. Furthermore, the media reported 27 individuals engaged in drug trafficking during July. Notably, a single police operation resulted in the apprehension of 21 drug traffickers who targeted school children.

Note: Some of the cases in consideration had multiple victims and some had multiple perpetrators.

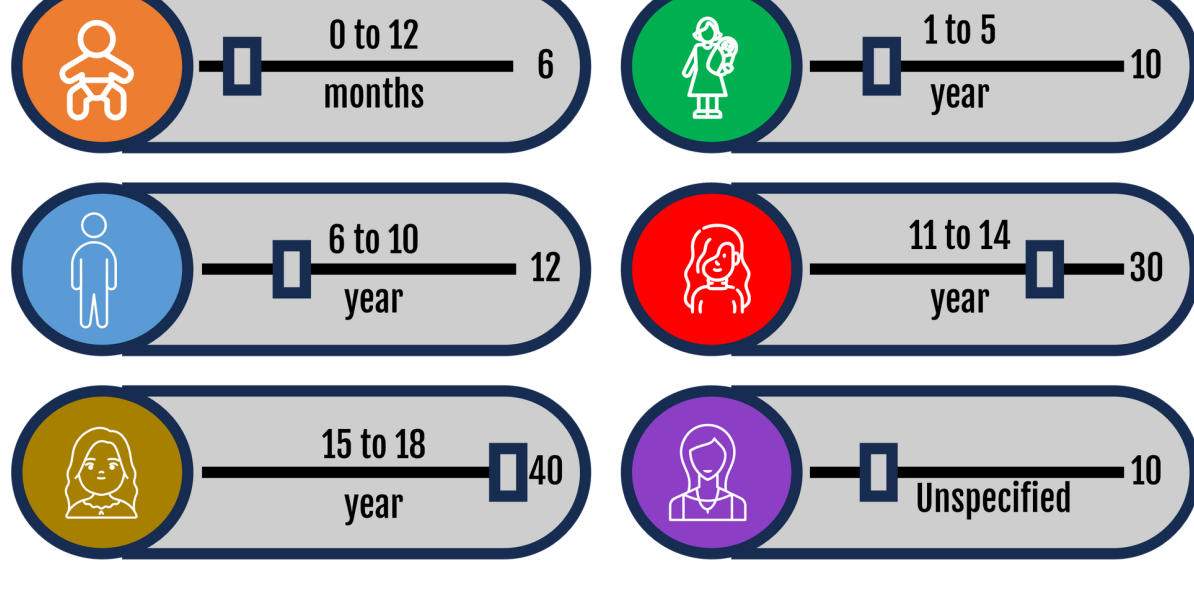
Gender Distribution of Victims



Total of 108 victims were documented in news, with a significant majority being female children, accounting for 62 children. This number constituted over half of the total victims reported. Alongside them, there were 43 male children who experienced abuse. Additionally, the reports also mentioned 3 unidentified victims whose genders were not specified.

Among both of the genders who fell victim to abuse, sexual abuse was the most prevalent form of abuse.

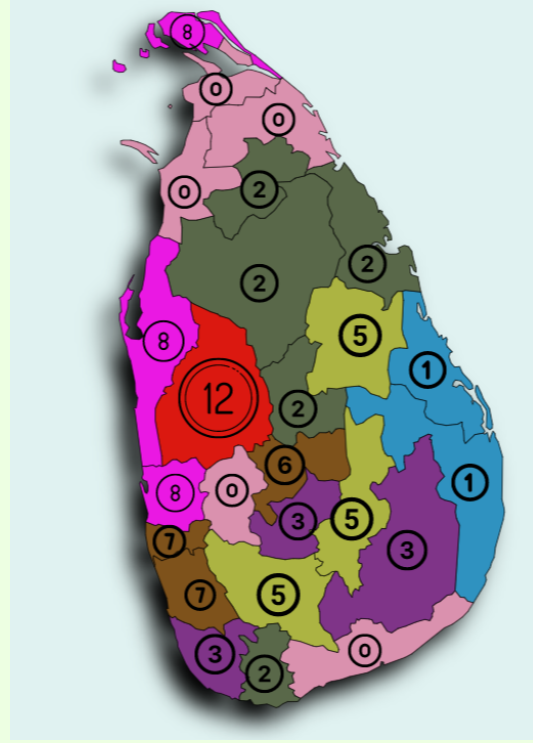
Age Distribution of Victims



Teenagers (15-18) comprise the highest age group affected by violent acts against children in the reported media, accounting for 37% of the victims in the month of July 2023. Following closely are children aged 10-15, with 28% being affected by acts of violence. The age group 6-10 year olds accounted for 11% of the affected, while 1-5 year olds represented 9% of the victims. The youngest age group, 0-12 months olds, accounted for 6% of those affected.

Sexual abuse was the most prevalent form of abuse among teenagers aged 10-18 years. For children aged 5-10 years, physical abuse was the most common form experienced. Negligence emerged as the highest form of abuse experienced by children aged 0-5 years.

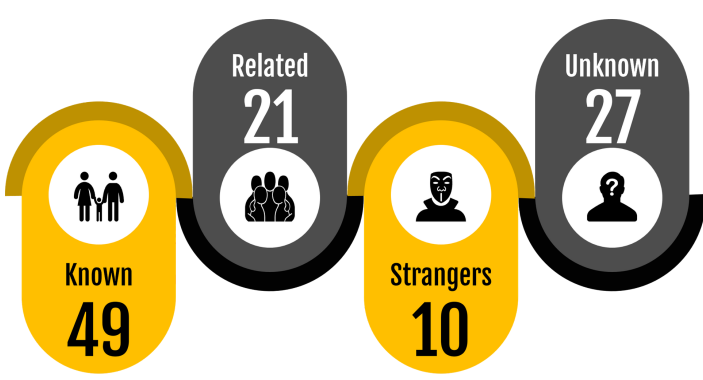
Geographic Distribution of Cases



The majority of the incidents reported in media coverage in July 2023 come from the district of Kurunegala with 12 reported cases affecting 13 victims. Gampaha, Jaffna and Puttiam reported 8 cases each with 11, 10 and 8 victims from each area respectively. Kalutara, Kandy and Ratnapura had reported 7, 6 and 5. Badulla, Polanaruwa reported 4 incidents each. A lower number of reports were observed from Ampara, Anuradhapura, Batticaloa, Galle, Matale, Matara, Monaragala, Nuwara Eliya, Trincomalee and Vavuniya. Zero reports were observed from Kilinochchi, Mullaitivu, Mannar, Kegalle, and Hambantota.

The highest density of victims were reported from the Western Province at 30 victims.

Abusers Relation to Victims



A total of 90 cases were covered by the press, involving 107 perpetrators. Notably, 46% of these perpetrators were individuals directly known to the child victims. Another 21% were identified as family members. Additionally, 9% of the perpetrators were strangers to the child, and 24% were noted as unidentified.

Accidents Involving Children

In the month of July 2023, media reports brought to light a total of 17 accidents, impacting 31 children. These incidents led to the loss of 15 young lives.

Among these accidents, 8 precious lives were lost in drowning incidents, while 7 young souls met their unfortunate fate in road accidents.

Additionally, a wasp attack left 16 students injured.



Critical Cases

Drug Dealers Target School Children

In recent times, a trend has emerged with **drug dealers specifically targeting school children**. In July 2023, the police arrested 22 suspects involved in 2 cases attempting to sell drugs to students. One suspect was apprehended in Badulla with a staggering 1793 drug capsules, while the other 21 were rounded up in Matale. This trend has persisted since June when 4 suspects were arrested for similar offenses.

This trend sheds light on several crucial factors.

Drug dealers view school pupils as easy targets due to their vulnerability and susceptibility.

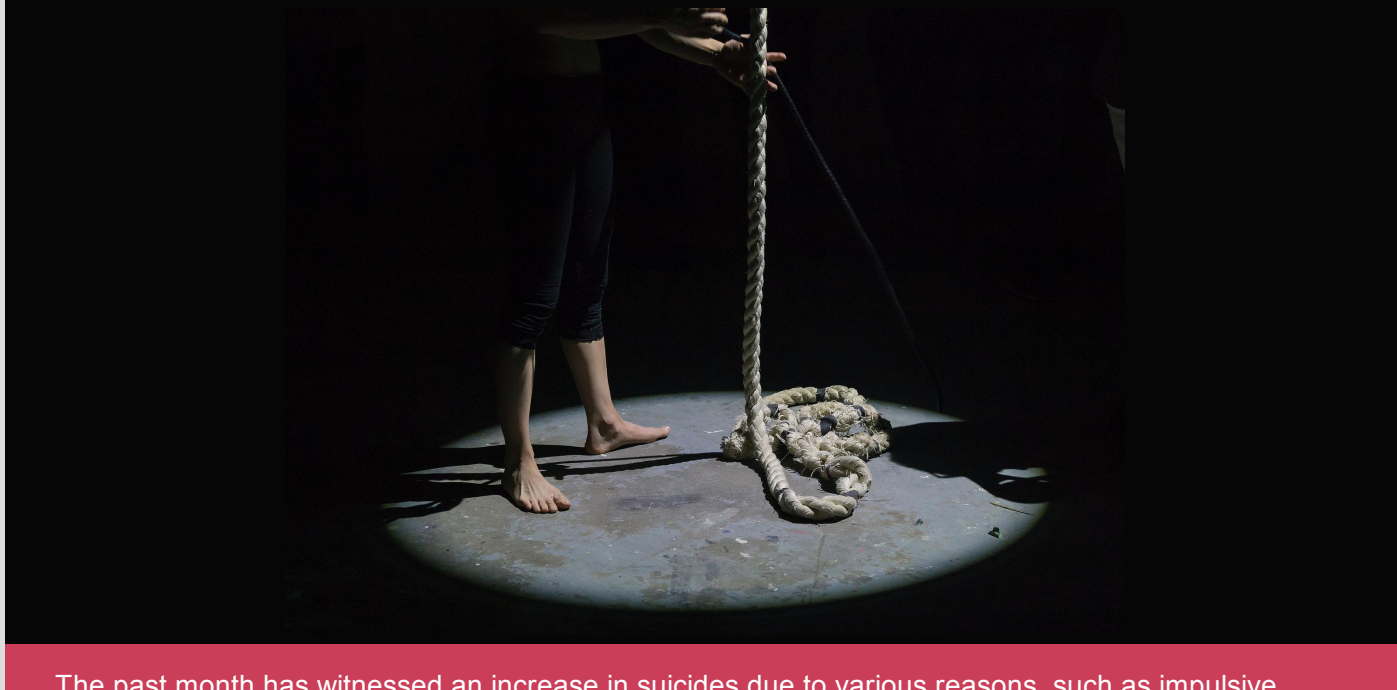
The allure of a potentially long-lasting and profitable customer base makes drug traffickers willing to take the risk.

Drug dealers also view school students as prospective recruits for their activities.

Youngsters who struggle academically, feeling left behind in the classroom and without empathetic guidance, may see drug dealing as a good source of income



Suicide amongst children: What is the deeper story?



The past month has witnessed an increase in suicides due to various reasons, such as impulsive reactions to cricket match disputes, arguments with family members, and feeling disheartened after a teacher refused to sign a report. Suicide is a complex issue with multiple factors involved. The current socio-economic state of the country has led to pressure and stress that affects not only adults but also our children.

Children often lack access to proper mental health support and understanding council, worsening their struggles.

As a result, fear, panic, and anxiety pervade the environment, leaving individuals feeling isolated and unsupported. There is a prevailing sense that no one can be trusted, leading to unreported cases of depression and other mental health issues.



Monks Abuse Children Sexually

7 child victims in 4 cases. The victims were at times novice monks and sometimes normal children of both gender who came to receive Sunday school lessons from the monks.



Sexually Exploited Boys

An incident occurred in Kalutara involving 4 underage boys and 2 men who were repeatedly sexually exploiting the boys at a tourist resort.



Fathers Sexually Abusing Children in the Absence of Mother

The media reported two cases of fathers sexually abusing their children in the absence of their mother, who had gone to work abroad.



Violence against Students by Teachers

Five cases revealed that four teachers and principals were assaulting five students, causing physical harm to the school's students