

UNIVERSITI TEKNOLOGI MARA

**EXPLORING CHILD SEXUAL
ABUSE IN THE MALDIVES:
MEASURES, CHALLENGES, AND
EFFECTIVE APPROACHES FROM
GOVERNMENT AND NGOS**

AMEENA ADAM

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ABUSE IN THE MALDIVES:
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GOVERNMENT AND NGOS**

AMEENA ADAM

Thesis submitted in fulfilment
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(Administrative Science)

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CONFIRMATION BY PANEL OF EXAMINERS

I certify that a Panel of Examiners has met on 6 October 2025 to conduct the final examination of Ameena Adam on her Doctors of Philosophy Thesis entitled "Exploring Child Sexual Abuse in the Maldives: Measures, Challenges, and Effective Approaches from Government and NGOs" by Universiti Teknologi MARA Act 1976 (Akta 173). The Panel of Examiners recommends that the student be awarded the relevant degree. The Panel of Examiners was as follows:

Tuan Nooriani Tuan Ismail, PhD
Associate Professor
Faculty of Administrative Science and Policy Studies
Universiti Teknologi MARA
(Chairman)

Nor Azira Ayob, PhD
Senior Lecturer
Faculty of Administrative Science and Policy Studies
Universiti Teknologi MARA
(Internal Examiner)

Ahmad Martadha Mohamed, PhD
Professor
School of Government, College of Law
Government and International Studies
Universiti Utara Malaysia
(External Examiner)

**PROFESSOR DR. HJH ZURAEDA
IBRAHIM**

Dean
Institute of Postgraduates Studies
Universiti Teknologi MARA

Date: 9 February 2026

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I declare that the work in this thesis was carried out in accordance with the regulations of Universiti Teknologi MARA. It is original and is the result of my work unless otherwise indicated or acknowledged as referenced work. This thesis has not been submitted to any other academic institution or non-academic institution for any degree or qualification.

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Name of Student	Ameena Adam
Student ID. No.	2020878744
Programme	Doctor of Philosophy (Administrative Science) - AM990
Faculty	Administrative Science and Policy Studies
Thesis Title	Exploring Child Sexual Abuse in the Maldives: Measures, Challenges, and Effective Approaches from Government and NGOs

Signature of Student «.^.....

Date February 2026

ABSTRACT

Child sexual abuse (CSA) remains a pervasive global issue with severe implications for child well-being and societal development, including in the Maldives. Despite governmental and non-governmental efforts, critical gaps persist in understanding the efficacy of existing measures, implementation challenges, and best practices in addressing CSA. This study explores the measures, challenges, and effective approaches employed by government and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in combating CSA in the Maldives, offering evidence-based insights to strengthen child protection frameworks. Methodologically, this qualitative study employed structured interviews with 30 key informants, comprising representatives from government bodies and NGOs actively engaged in CSA prevention. Data collection and analysis were guided by Braun and Clarke's thematic analysis framework, leveraging NVivo software to ensure systematic coding, pattern identification, and theme development. This approach enabled a rigorous exploration of stakeholder perspectives while maintaining methodological transparency. Theoretically, the study is anchored in Institutional Theory, Ecological Systems Theory, and Social Learning Theory, which collectively illuminate the structural, environmental, and behavioral dimensions of CSA responses. Findings revealed that while significant measures such as policy enforcement, legislative reforms, and institutional capacity-building are in place (RQ 1), persistent challenges hinder progress (RQ 2), including policy implementation gaps, resource constraints, and inter-agency coordination failures. The study identifies actionable strategies (RQ 3) to mitigate CSA, emphasizing robust law enforcement, community engagement, and systemic accountability mechanisms. A critical insight was the pivotal role of multi-sector collaboration in building public trust and sustainable child protection systems. By integrating empirical findings from the Maldivian context with theoretical and methodological rigor, this research advances the global discourse on CSA and provides policymakers with targeted recommendations. It underscores the urgency of addressing systemic inefficiencies through coordinated government-NGO action, ultimately contributing to safer environments for children in the Maldives and comparable settings.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
CONFIRMATION BY PANEL OF EXAMINERS	ii
AUTHOR'S DECLARATION	iii
ABSTRACT	iv
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT	v
TABLE OF CONTENTS	vi
LIST OF TABLES	xv
LIST OF FIGURES	xvi
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS	xvii
CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION	1
1.1 Research Background	1
1.2 Problem Statement	5
1.3 Research Questions	13
1.4 Research Objectives	13
1.5 Scope of Study	14
1.6 Significance of this Study	16
1.7 Terminologies and Organisations'Clarification	18
1.7.1 Child Abuse	18
1.7.2 Child Sexual Abuse (CSA)	18
1.7.3 Ministry of Gender, Family, and Social Services	18
1.7.4 Maldives Police Service	18
1.7.5 Children's Rights Commission	19
1.7.6 Children's Ombudspersons Office	19
1.7.7 Peoples Majlis	19
1.7.8 Advocating the Rights of Children (ARC)	19

1.7.9	Hope for Women	20
1.8	Thesis Outline	20
CHAPTER 2 LITERATURE REVIEW		22
2.1	Introduction	22
2.2	Child Sexual Abuse (CSA) from an International Perspective	22
2.3	Child Sexual Abuse (CSA) in the Maldives	29
2.4	Factors Contributing to Child Sexual Abuse (CSA)	32
2.4.1	Individual Level	32
2.4.2	Family Level	33
2.4.3	School Level	35
2.4.4	Community Level	36
2.4.5	National and International Level	36
2.5	Policies and Acts Related to Child Abuse and Child Sexual Abuse (CSA)	37
2.6	Roles and Responsibilities of Relevant Authorities	40
2.6.1	Ministry of Gender, Family, and Social Services	40
2.6.2	Family and Child Protection Department - Maldives Police Services	43
2.6.3	Children's Rights Commission	44
2.6.4	Children's Ombudspersons Office	45
2.6.5	Advocating the Rights of Children (ARC)	48
2.7	Challenges Addressing CSA in Developing Countries	48
2.7.1	Taboo and Social Stigma	49
2.7.2	Poverty and Economic Vulnerability	49
2.7.3	Weaknesses of the Legal System	50
2.7.4	Lack of Knowledge about CSA	51
2.7.5	Institutional and structural challenges	51
2.8	Challenges in Dealing with Child Sexual Abuse (CSA) in the Maldives	52
2.8.1	Funding	52
2.8.2	Community	53
2.8.3	Communication Barriers and Medical Issues	54

- 2.8.4 Lack of Parental Care and How the Child Becomes
- 2.8.5 Role of Educators
- 2.9 Intervention Mechanisms for CSA in Asia
 - 2.9.1 Community-based Interventions
 - 2.9.2 School-based Interventions
 - 2.9.3 Legal Frameworks and Government Interventions
 - 2.9.4 Therapeutic and Counselling Interventions
 - 2.9.5 Digital and Technological Interventions
- 2.10 Challenges in Implementing CSA Interventions
 - 2.10.1 Cultural Taboos and Stigmatisation
 - 2.10.2 Insufficient Intersectoral Collaboration
 - 2.10.3 Inadequate Legal Enforcement
 - 2.10.4 Funding Intervention Programs
 - 2.10.5 Economic Constraints
 - 2.10.6 Training Gaps
 - 2.10.7 Inadequate Awareness Campaigns
- 2.11 Past Studies and Gaps
- 2.12 Theory Related to Child Sexual Abuse (CSA)
 - 2.12.1 Institutional Theory
 - 2.12.2 Ecological Systems Theory
 - 2.12.3 Social Learning Theory
- 2.13 Theoretical Framework
- 2.14 Summary

CHAPTER 3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

- 3.1 Introduction
- 3.2 Research Philosophy
- 3.3 Research Design
 - 3.3.1 Philosophy
 - 3.3.2 Approach
 - 3.3.3 Strategy

3.3.4	Choice	97
3.3.5	Time Horizon	97
3.3.6	Techniques and Procedures	97
3.4	Unit of Analysis	101
3.5	Sample Size and Inclusion Criteria	101
3.6	Sampling Techniques	105
3.7	Research Instrument	107
3.7.1	Interview Protocol	108
3.8	Qualitative Validity (Face Validity and Content Validity): Expert-Driven Pre-Test and Participant-Driven Pre-Test	109
3.9	Qualitative Reliability	110
3.10	Pilot Study	111
3.11	Data Collection	112
3.12	Data Analysis	117
3.13	Ethical Concerns	117
3.14	Summary	118
CHAPTER 4 FINDINGS		119
4.1	Introduction	119
4.2	Organisational Profiles of the Participants	119
4.2.1	Government Organisations	120
4.2.1.1	<i>President's Office (Former President, Former Vice President)</i>	120
4.2.1.2	<i>Ministry of Gender, Family and Social Services (Now known as Ministry of Social and Family Development)</i>	120
4.2.1.3	<i>Maldives Police Services</i>	121
4.2.1.4	<i>Ministry of Education</i>	121
4.2.1.5	<i>Parliament</i>	122
4.2.1.6	<i>Supreme Court</i>	122
4.2.1.7	<i>Criminal Court</i>	122
4.2.1.8	<i>Atoll Council</i>	123
4.2.1.9	<i>Prosecutor General's Office</i>	123

4.2.1.10	<i>Attorney General's Office</i>	124
4.2.1.11	<i>Indira Gandhi Memorial Hospital</i>	124
4.2.1.12	<i>Police Integrity Commission</i>	124
4.2.1.13	<i>Maldives National University</i>	125
4.2.1.14	<i>Family Protection Authority</i>	125
4.2.1.15	<i>Child and Family Protection Services</i>	126
4.2.1.16	<i>Children's Ombudspersons Office</i>	126
4.2.2	Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO)	127
4.2.2.1	<i>UNICEF</i>	127
4.2.2.2	<i>Advocating the Rights of Children (ARC)</i>	127
4.2.2.3	<i>Hope for Women</i>	128
	Existing Measures to Address Child Sexual Abuse (CSA) in the Maldives (Research Objective 1)	129
4.3.1	Enforcement of Laws and Policies	132
4.3.2	Implementation of Guidelines and Procedures	133
4.3.3	Awareness and Education Initiatives	134
4.3.4	Implementation of the Child Protection Act	136
4.3.5	Continuous Review and Improvement of Laws	137
4.3.6	Legislative Changes	138
4.3.7	Public Involvement and Community Engagement	139
4.3.8	Monitoring and Evaluation of Implementation	140
4.3.9	Addressing Legal Gaps and Challenges	142
4.3.10	Establishment of Institutions under the Child Rights Protection Act (Act No. 19/2019)	143
4.3.11	Addressing Delays in Legal Processes	144
4.3.12	Creation of Internal Protocols	145
4.3.13	Addressing Workforce and Resource Gaps	146
4.3.14	Development of Child Protection Facilities	147
	Challenges in Addressing Child Sexual Abuse (CSA) in the Maldives (Research Objective 2)	148
4.4.1	Lack of Awareness and Training	151
4.4.2	Implementation Gaps in Policies and Laws	152

4.4.3	Resource Limitations	154
4.4.4	Delays in Legal Processes	155
4.4.5	Inadequate Facilities and Government Support Systems	157
4.4.6	Institutional Challenges and Inertia	158
4.4.7	Ineffective Legal Framework	159
4.4.8	Neglect of Victim Support	160
4.4.9	Challenges in Policy Development	162
4.4.10	Call for Continuous Improvement	163
4.4.11	Judicial Process Issues	164
4.4.12	Need for Community Involvement	165
4.5	Effective Approaches for Addressing Child Sexual Abuse (CSA) in the Maldives (Research Objective 3)	166
4.5.1	Enhancing Awareness and Training	169
4.5.2	Resource Allocation and Infrastructure	170
4.5.3	Long-term Strategy and Evaluation	171
4.5.4	Legal Framework and Reforms	173
4.5.5	Enhancing Inter-Agency Collaboration	174
4.5.6	Building Public Trust in Child Protection Systems	175
4.5.7	Systemic Challenges and Accountability	176
4.5.8	Strengthening the Implementation of Laws and Regulations	177
4.5.9	Addressing Evidence and Procedural Challenges	178
4.5.10	Community and Youth Involvement	179
4.6	Summary	180
	CHAPTER 5 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION	181
5.1	Introduction	181
5.2	Recapitulation of Study	181
5.3	Discussion	183
5.3.1	Existing Measures to Address Child Sexual Abuse (CSA) in the Maldives (Research Objective 1)	183
5.3.1.1	<i>Enforcement of Laws and Policies</i>	183
5.3.1.2	<i>Implementation of Guidelines and Procedures</i>	184

5.3.1.3	<i>Awareness and Education Initiatives</i>	186
5.3.1.4	<i>Implementation of the Child Protection Act</i>	187
5.3.1.5	<i>Continuous Review and Improvement of Laws</i>	189
5.3.1.6	<i>Legislative Changes</i>	190
5.3.1.7	<i>Public Involvement and Community Engagement</i>	192
5.3.1.8	<i>Monitoring and Evaluation of Implementation</i>	193
5.3.1.9	<i>Addressing Legal Gaps and Challenges</i>	195
5.3.1.10	<i>Establishment of Institutions under the Child Rights Protection Act (Act No. 19/2019)</i>	196
5.3.1.11	<i>Addressing Delays in Legal Processes</i>	197
5.3.1.12	<i>Creation of Internal Protocols</i>	199
5.3.1.13	<i>Addressing Workforce and Resource Gaps</i>	200
5.3.1.14	<i>Development of Child Protection Facilities</i>	202
	Challenges in Addressing Child Sexual Abuse (CSA) in the Maldives (Research Objective 2)	203
5.3.2.1	<i>Lack of Awareness and Training</i>	203
5.3.2.2	<i>Implementation Gaps in Policies and Laws</i>	205
5.3.2.3	<i>Resource Limitations</i>	207
5.3.2.4	<i>Delays in Legal Processes</i>	209
5.3.2.5	<i>Inadequate Facilities and Support Systems</i>	211
5.3.2.6	<i>Institutional Challenges and Inertia</i>	212
5.3.2.7	<i>Ineffective Legal Framework</i>	214
5.3.2.8	<i>Neglect of Victim Support</i>	215
5.3.2.9	<i>Challenges in Policy Development</i>	217
5.3.2.10	<i>Call for Continuous Improvement</i>	219
5.3.2.11	<i>Judicial Process Issues</i>	220
5.3.2.12	<i>Need for Community Involvement</i>	221
	Effective Approaches for Addressing Child Sexual Abuse (CSA) in the Maldives (Research Objective 3): Recommendation of this Study	223
5.3.3.1	<i>Enhancing Awareness and Training</i>	223
5.3.3.2	<i>Resource Allocation and Infrastructure</i>	225

5.3.3.3	<i>Long-term Strategy and Evaluation</i>	226
5.3.3.4	<i>Legal Framework and Reforms</i>	228
5.3.3.5	<i>Enhancing Inter-Agency Collaboration</i>	229
5.3.3.6	<i>Building Public Trust in Child Protection Systems</i>	231
5.3.3.7	<i>Systemic Challenges and Accountability</i>	233
5.3.3.8	<i>Strengthening the Implementation of Laws and Regulations</i>	234
5.3.3.9	<i>Addressing Evidence and Procedural Challenges</i>	236
5.3.3.10	<i>Community and Youth Involvement</i>	238
5.4	Findings (Research Objectives 1, 2 and 3) and Theories (Institutional Theory, Ecological Systems Theory, and Social Learning Theory)	239
5.4.1	Existing Measures to Address Child Sexual Abuse (CSA) in the Maldives (Research Objective 1) and Theories	239
5.4.1.1	<i>Institutional Theory</i>	239
5.4.1.2	<i>Ecological Systems Theory</i>	240
5.4.1.3	<i>Social Learning Theory</i>	240
5.4.2	Challenges in Addressing Child Sexual Abuse (CSA) in the Maldives (Research Objective 2) and Theories	241
5.4.2.1	<i>Institutional Theory</i>	241
5.4.2.2	<i>Ecological Systems Theory</i>	241
5.4.2.3	<i>Social Learning Theory</i>	242
5.4.3	Effective Approaches for Addressing Child Sexual Abuse (CSA) in the Maldives (Research Objective 3) and Theories	242
5.4.3.1	<i>Institutional Theory</i>	242
5.4.3.2	<i>Ecological Systems Theory</i>	243
5.4.3.3	<i>Social Learning Theory</i>	243
5.5	Monitoring, Audits, Feedback Mechanisms, and Adaptive Response to Online Child Sexual Abuse (CSA) Framework	244
5.6	Implications of this Study	249
5.6.1	Practical Implications	249
5.6.2	Theoretical Implications	249
5.6.3	Policy Implications	250
5.7	Limitations of this Study and Suggestions for Future Studies	251

5.8	Conclusion	252
	REFERENCES	255
	APPENDICES	292
	AUTHOR'S PROFILE	334

LIST OF TABLES

Tables	Title	Page
Table 1.1	Statistics of Reported Cases to the Ministry of Gender, Family and Social Services from 2017-2022	6
Table 1.2	Statistics of Reported Cases to the Maldives Police Service from 2014-2020	9
Table 2.1	Past Studies and Gaps	67
Table 3.1	Example of the Thematic Analysis Process Performed by this Study for Research Objective 1 (Theme 1): Guided by Braun and Clarke's (2006) 6-Step Framework	99
Table 3.2	Participants (Representatives from Government and NGOs), Designation, and Pseudonym	102
Table 3.3	Data Collection	113
Table 4.1	Existing Measures to Address Child Sexual Abuse (CSA) in the Maldives: Key Themes, Subthemes, and Number of Responses (Major to Minor)	130
Table 4.2	Challenges in Addressing Child Sexual Abuse (CSA) in the Maldives: Key Themes, Subthemes, and Number of Responses (Major to Minor)	149
Table 4.3	Effective Approaches for Addressing Child Sexual Abuse (CSA) in the Maldives: Key Themes, Subthemes, and Number of Responses (Major to Minor)	167
Table 5.1	Framework for Monitoring, Audits, Feedback Mechanisms, and Adaptive Response to Online Child Sexual Abuse (CSA)	245

LIST OF FIGURES

Figures	Title	Page
Figure 1.1	Outreach Program Conducted by the Ministry of Gender, Family and Social Service, Maldives (June 2016 - November 2018)	3
Figure 2.1	Children's Ombudspersons Office	47
Figure 2.2	Theoretical Framework	91
Figure 3.1	Research Onion Adapted from Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill (2007)	95
Figure 4.1	Existing Measures to Address Child Sexual Abuse (CSA) in the Maldives: Key Themes and Subthemes (Default Order by NVivo Software)	131
Figure 4.2	Challenges in Addressing Child Sexual Abuse (CSA) in the Maldives: Key Themes and Subthemes (Default Order by NVivo Software)	150
Figure 4.3	Effective Approaches for Addressing Child Sexual Abuse (CSA) in the Maldives: Key Themes and Subthemes (Default Order by NVivo Software)	168

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

Abbreviations

ARC	Advocating the Rights of Children
CAC	Child Advocacy Centre Model
CAPTA	Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act
CSA	Child Sexual Abuse
CSG	Community Social Groups
CRC	Convention on the Rights of the Child
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisations
UN	United Nations
UNICEF	United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund.
USA	United States of America

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Research Background

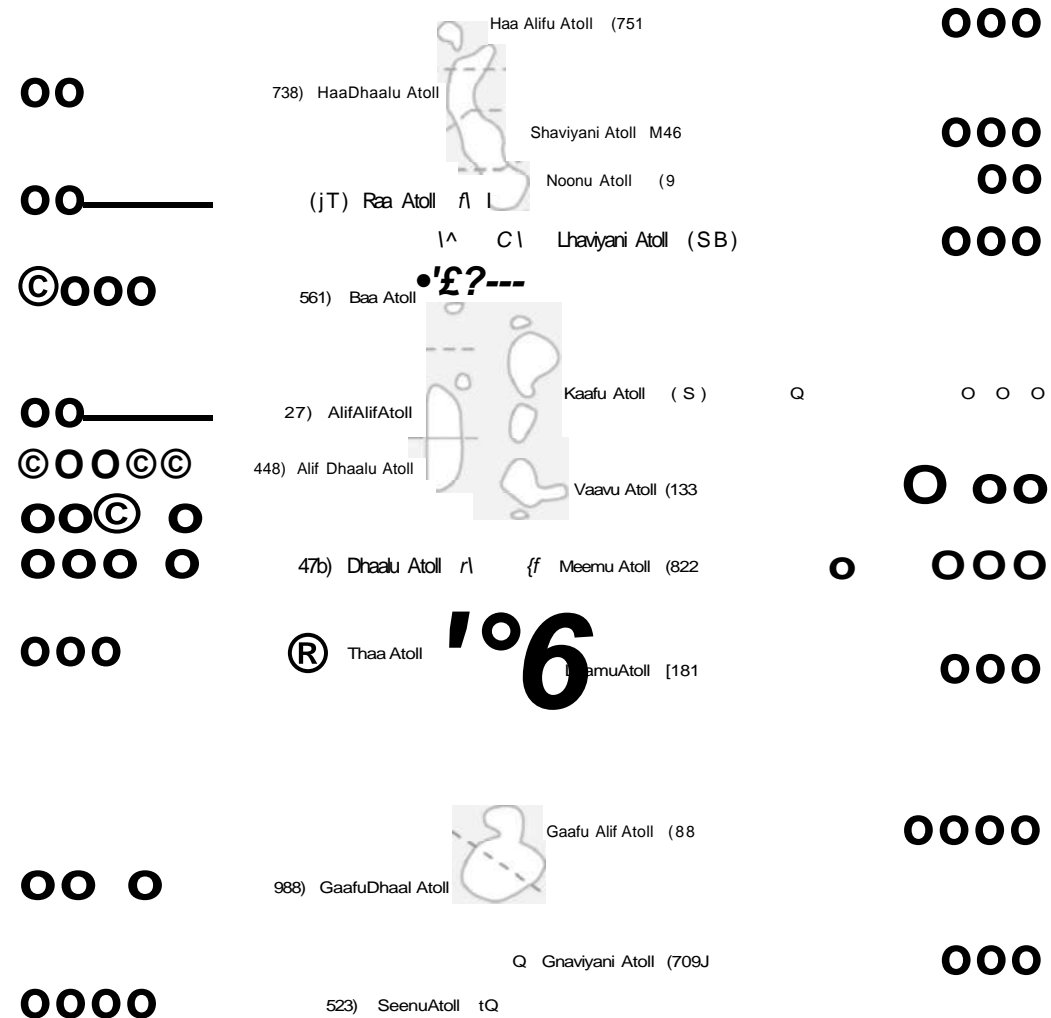
The Maldives, a nation made up of 1,192 islands spread throughout the Indian Ocean, is 100 per cent Muslim. The geographical distribution of these islands makes it very difficult to administer laws, services, and other essential matters, and providing mandatory equal opportunities to all nationals would be almost impossible. The Ministry of Gender, Family, and Social Services has an important role in protecting vulnerable groups. The Ministry's primary functions include promoting women's rights and empowerment, advancing gender equality, protecting children's rights, enhancing family well-being, and providing social protection services. The Ministry promotes and protects children's rights, emphasises the prevention of violence against children, and encourages their active participation. It partners with various stakeholders to create island-wide Community Social Groups (CSGs) that identify and support vulnerable children and their families. These preventive measures are an essential component of combating child abuse and maintaining the safety of the entire nation's children, and emphasise that comprehensive strategies are critical to effectively combat the epidemic of child sexual abuse (CSA) in the Maldives.

Child abuse has become a global problem and one that governments across the globe have taken very seriously for many years. The Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) is one of the most important international agreements for protecting children's rights. It was adopted by the United Nations (UN) General Assembly on November 20, 1989, and entered into force on September 2, 1990. The CRC is the most ratified international human rights treaty in history. It identifies the fundamental rights of children and the responsibilities of governments to uphold them. The Convention comprises 54 Articles, of which Article 41 deals with substantive matters and the balance deals with procedural aspects. The CRC is a landmark treaty ratified by 196 states, including the Maldives, but excluding the USA. It establishes the protections that all children should enjoy and emphasises the need for local and national governments to prioritise children's rights.

The CRC was ratified, and other Children's Acts were enacted in the Maldives in 1991. Signed from the various international conventions is an elective procedure, and any children involved in the armed conflict in the Maldives, the sale of children, prostitution, and child pornography. However, the country's geographical realities present significant obstacles to upholding these acts, making it challenging to fulfill their promises of access to basic services and support. Although some social services have improved, the lower rates of poverty and maternal mortality mask the need for special attention to the rights of Maldivian children, as the nation has a large group of children under 14, with almost half of the population being under age 14 in 2010. The islands' sprawling geography hinders government and NGO penetration at scale, necessitating work on systems to scale service delivery and protect rights.

To address children's issues, the Ministry of Gender, Family, and Social Services implemented the Ministry of Gender and Family Outreach program from June 2016 to November 2018 in 20 atolls, as illustrated in Figure 1.1. The interventional outreach consists of key components that include sessions for the prevention of child abuse, installation of child-friendly interview rooms, monitoring campaigns on gender equality laws, capacity-building training sessions for health and social workers, etc. This program also sought to encourage the establishment of CSGs to enable localised support for families and children in need. Such outreach initiatives are a testament to the government's resolve to combat child abuse and strengthen children's rights. The initiatives reflect its recognition of the need for growing public awareness on these issues in cultivating a safer environment where children can grow without fear of violence or exploitation. Sustaining these positive changes and being responsive to varying circumstances will require ongoing partnership and buy-in from multiple stakeholders.

**M. TRY OF GENDER AND FAMILY OUTREACH:
June 2016 - November 2018**



- Awareness on Gender Equality Law for Institutions
- Capacity Building Trainings for Health Si Social Workers
- Establishment of Community Social Groups (CSG)
- Health Screening Si Awareness Sessions for Senior Citizens
- Sessions for Youth to Bridge the Intergenerational Gap with Elderly
- Sign Language Training for Institutions Si Individuals
- Disability Sensitization Sessions
- AHAN Child Abuse Prevention Sessions
- Establishment of Child Friendly Interview Rooms

Figure 1.1 Outreach Program Conducted by the Ministry of Gender, Family and Social Service, Maldives (June 2016 -November 2018)

A real-time reporting system was created to handle violence against children, allowing local settlements to raise an alarm for suspected cases through a hotline based on a local settlement report from UNICEF Maldives for 2017. In particular, the report highlighted strengthened capacities within the Ministry of Gender, Family, and Social Services, developed through UNTCEF training, including skills in result-based planning and monitoring. This approach also equipped Department staff with the skills to write forward-looking planning documents, which are fundamental to strategic assessments and the delivery of better services. The program also included an emphasis on increasing the state police's capacity to investigate child violence cases in a child-sensitive manner. However, these initiatives are necessary to build a stronger support system and to highlight the need for continued training and capacity development among the multiple stakeholders involved in protecting children in the Maldives. This is to tackle CSA more effectively and enhance children's overall welfare.

Unfortunately, the problem of CSA in the Maldives has a long and ongoing history. In Buddhist practice, a myth of the sea beast "Rannamaari," a sea demon that tormented the people, emerged. To placate this demon, a virgin girl was sacrificed every month, which is also reflected in our bygone thinking around child abuse. It is said that the Arab visitor Abul Barakaath Al Barbary, who was visiting the Maldives, made a decisive intervention when he donned a girl's clothing and confronted the demon, thereby converting the Maldives to Islam. Although this narrative reveals systemic issues with violence against women and children, it also highlights recurring challenges with CSA that remain within society in the Maldives. This context is important to understand when examining present-day practices and responses to child abuse, as these historical narratives have shaped contemporary perspectives on these important issues.

At present, sexual abuse, especially child molestation, continues to be a serious and common type of child abuse wherein adults use children for sexual gratification. This abuse can take many forms, such as coercing or pressuring children into sexual activities. CSA can happen in a lot of settings, such as in homes, schools, and workplaces; child marriage is reported as a common form of sexual violence. UNICEF said that child marriage is one of the most shocking violations of children's rights. WHO explained that sexual abuse involves child victims being involved in sexual activities that he/she is not developmentally able to understand, which violates accepted family roles. These definitions underscore the critical need for ongoing work focused on

addressing CSA and supporting education and awareness initiatives at the community level to prevent future exploitation and violence against children.

Although social and societal services have improved in the Maldives, child sexual abuse remains a significant concern in the country. Every year, thousands of children go through many forms of abuse, much of which goes unnoticed, as people perceive abuse differently. This hesitancy to report cases is growing frustrating, as families may question the validity of the child's statement or fall into disbelief that a trusted neighbour or family member can be the perpetrator of such abuse. Moreover, it is disturbing that some family member knows the abuse is happening yet remain silent for their embarrassment or fear of being caught by authorities. There have also been cases of fathers sexually abusing their daughters, perpetuating a sad cycle of silence and complicity in the family. The foundation of a society where children have a safe place to grow and thrive, free from being abused and exploited, is addressing these painful and unpleasant truths.

1.2 Problem Statement

Male is the capital of the Maldives and, as such, houses all the authorities and most of the country's resources. Consequently, the rest of the country is frequently overlooked, with most CSA cases occurring on the islands. Although there have been many policies put in place to limit the cases of child abuse, the statistics that show the number of cases over the years are alarming. For example, the cases reported by the CSA to the Ministry of Gender, Family, and Social Services between 2017 and 2022, as Table 1.1 shows, include a total of 1865 sexual abuse cases. There has been a resurgence in the past decade, with 288 cases reported in 2022. However, even the years that have dropped off the radar were still all-time highs, which is a concern. Data such as this emphasise the urgent need for systems to protect children, and the failures of the current system to do so for vulnerable populations in the islands.

Table 1.1
 Statistics of Reported Cases to the Ministry of Gender, Family and Social Services from
 2017-2022

Types of abuse	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	Total
Sexual	418	314	360	282	203	288	1865
Physical	354	263	299	143	135	252	1446
Emotional	181	97	144	52	61	147	682
Neglect	306	280	45	237	212	303	1383
Bullying	44	55	45	15	27	0	186
Cyberbullying	8	11	29	13	5	9	75
Harassment	8	2	0	0	0	35	45
Child abandonment	10	10	0	0	1	0	21
Child death	1	0	0	0	0	0	1
Witness to domestic violence	29	55	65	62	83	189	483
Exploitation	0	0	0	0	0	26	26
Commercial exploitation	5	11	2	0	0	28	46
Commercial sexual exploitation	3	1	7	1	0	0	12
Exploitation by extremists	0	0	0	0	0	2	2
Blackmail	0	0	0	0	0	19	19
Sexual grooming	0	0	0	0	0	2	2
Cyber grooming	0	0	0	0	0	1	1
Child trafficking	0	0	1	0	0	0	1
Others	1	1	2	4	2	0	10

Source: Ministry of Gender, Family and Social Services (2021)

Even the painstaking process of collecting evidence of child abuse is fruitless when neither the government nor even the NGOs take measures to prevent child abuse and punish the criminals. A 2017 report states that, despite abundant research and information on advising governmental agencies and preventing CSA, support still eludes. Additionally, funding bodies often refuse to provide relevant financial assistance. Barnert et al. (2016) state that child welfare funds are key to the effective implementation of legislation. Thus, a significant limitation that impedes child protection in the Maldives is the lack of financial assistance for these government agencies and NGO organisations to fulfil their mandates. The disbursement of funds to these Maldivian child protection entities has either been neglected or is currently stalled in parliament and the budget division. This results in a lack of progress and support for these critical initiatives.

Another major obstacle, researchers note, is that the community does not understand its role in combating CSA. As Todahl et al. (2019) point out, many people do not know about the personal and straightforward steps they can take to reduce child

abuse and neglect. Such ignorance stems from a lack of awareness and education about CSA in schools and communities (Mathews, 2017). Despite the alarming prevalence of child abuse in the Maldives, a profound chasm exists between societal awareness and meaningful intervention. Public hesitancy to report incidents, which is a pivotal step in safeguarding children effectively, fuels the cycle of abuse. This procrastination results in the prolonged victimization of children and systematically denies alleged victims prompt access to the protective mechanisms designed to ensure their safety and well-being. Therefore, by raising awareness and encouraging proactive responses to CSA, communities can foster a culture of accountability and support.

A major cultural problem is the number of children who feel powerless against parental drug use. Drug-addicted parents mistreat their children specifically because they suffer from untreated psychological problems, and complications make sexual abuse prevention an issue. Parental psychopathology was identified explicitly by Newberger and Newberger (1981) as a causal explanation of child maltreatment. Likewise, Hussain and Tajuddin (2015) observed that predators typically prey on vulnerable children who have experienced abuse from their parents. This phenomenon is known and reported to be a risk factor for sexual abuse. Meinck et al. (2015) state that bad parent-child relationships, especially between daughters and their moms, are risk factors for sexual victimisation. It will require urgent action. Tackling parental addiction and its impact on child welfare is a crucial part of a broader approach to end CSA in the Maldives and protect the well-being of children.

The issue of child exploitation surfaced as a national juggernaut. Various organisations have sprung up to fight this grave problem, which includes physical and mental abuse of children. Unfortunately, many incidents of abuse occur from well-intentioned but misguided attempts to train or discipline children, and the parents would say it was positive. However, parents often resort to physical punishment, which can become harmful. The line between punishment and abuse is drawn based on whether a child is left injured. According to Durrant (1996), the majority of parents are very much opposed to harming their children and are often regretful afterwards. Thus, physical punishments were not intended to inflict harm but rather to elicit compliance and respect. Therefore, it is highly relevant to seek positive alternatives that can assist parents and spread awareness of using healthier discipline strategies. Those alternatives prioritise positive discipline principles and children's rights in the Maldives, where child exploitation is a notorious problem.

Moreover, in the Maldives, CSA is closely associated with societal status and concepts of "honour". When their children fall victim to CSA, victim families tend to feel shame rather than anger. Moreover, CSA is very much linked to incest, whereby children are abused more often by family members than by strangers. In Maldivian society before 2006, the taboo surrounding sexual assault created a challenge for awareness. However, ratifying the Convention on the Rights of the Child shifted the perception of children's rights. While the social stigma surrounding CSA is gradually shifting, many families choose to deny or overlook abuse that occurs in their own homes, primarily due to social pressures to save face. Breaking the stigma around CSA is an important part of creating a safe environment for victims to come forward and get help.

Furthermore, children in the Maldives are not often equipped to recognise inappropriate adult behaviours, thus leading to more exploitation and abuse that frequently go unreported. The socioeconomic status of children from low-income families makes them particularly vulnerable. Given the significant spike in reported cases, this indicates the need to question the efficacy of these enforcement agencies to act as a deterrent against child abuse. Poor coordination among the formal agencies that exist to respond to child abuse also feeds into the problem. Most agencies operate in silos because effective communication and collaboration are rare. This fragmentation weakens the collective response to child sexual abuse and restricts communities from protecting children. This signals that better inter-agency working is needed to support a more joined-up approach to child protection that meets the broader needs of victims.

Similar trends are evident when comparing CSA cases between the Maldives and Malaysia. According to data from the Ministry of Women, Family, and Community Development (2017), both countries share common challenges when it comes to reporting and tracking abuse cases. Miscommunication between the Ministry of Gender, Family, and Social Services and the Maldives Police Service over reported cases only deepens confusion. The mismatch in statistics underscores the urgency of a more effective, coordinated response. Reported cases to the Maldives Police Service between 2017 and 2022 are presented in Table 1.2. However, an inconsistency remains in the data reported between the entities. Such inconsistencies impede accountability and effective action. It is essential to improve reporting mechanisms and data collection processes across agencies so that society can unite against CSA.

Table 1.2
 Statistics of Reported Cases to the Maldives Police Service from 2014-2020

Details	2014			2015			2016			2017						
	Reported	Victims		Reported	Victims		Reported	Victims		Reported	Victims					
		Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total			
Physical	210	100	39	139	426	168	64	232	391	162	93	255	474	208	113	321
Emotional	24	8	17	25	28	7	24	31	47	16	38	54	61	30	49	79
Sexual abuse	290	34	212	246	337	58	255	313	377	63	258	321	351	77	240	317
Neglect	46	6	5	11	157	37	31	68	136	44	44	88	131	47	36	83
Total	570	148	266	414	948	265	358	623	951	279	419	698	1017	353	421	774

Details	2018			2019			2020					
	Reported	Victims		Reported	Victims		Reported	Victims				
		Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total		
Physical	351	163	69	232	295	141	68	209	274	123	74	197
Emotional	71	23	55	78	96	37	53	90	138	39	75	114
Sexual abuse	329	77	231	308	332	57	240	297	432	94	337	431
Neglect	153	34	32	66	164	65	48	113	170	50	55	105
Total	904	290	369	659	887	295	402	697	1014	299	523	822

In the Maldives, social dynamics reveal a widespread lack of faith in government institutions. While many voice their concerns about child abuse, they often refrain from proposing solutions due to a distrust of the government. According to Transparency Maldives (2015), 51% of Maldivians do not trust the judiciary, a decline from previous years. Hence, all problem-solving requires a public-private partnership and stakeholder engagement to build trust. According to the Children's Ombudsperson, Niumath Shafiq, in an interview on July 19, 2021, a baseline study revealed that minimal cooperation among authorities hinders a prompt response to CSA. Thus, upon consideration, this study recognises the importance of identifying the obstacles that prevent the government and NGOs from effectively addressing the urgent protection issue in the Maldives, with the aim of enhancing their responses and safeguarding.

The Child Protection Monitoring and Evaluation Reference Group (2014) previously highlighted several knowledge gaps. The knowledge gaps identified by the Child Protection Monitoring and Evaluation Reference Group (2014) align with the research questions in this study in several pertinent ways. The first knowledge gap is the need for better tools and methodologies, as current research instruments are perceived as inadequate for capturing comprehensive data on violence against children (Child Protection Monitoring and Evaluation Reference Group, 2014). This gap relates to RQ 1, as understanding the effectiveness of government and NGO measures may require the development of improved methodologies to comprehensively assess interventions. The second gap highlights a focus shift from merely collecting prevalence data to understanding the underlying causes of violence. This indicates a desire for deeper insights into why such violence occurs (Child Protection Monitoring and Evaluation Reference Group, 2014). This aligns with both RQ 1 and RQ 2. Investigating the measures implemented by the government and NGOs could benefit from analysing the underlying causes of CSA, while recognising the challenges.

The third knowledge gap concerns understanding the risk factors associated with violence (Child Protection Monitoring and Evaluation Reference Group, 2014). There is a clear need to identify and analyse these risk factors, rather than solely focusing on the different types of abuse, to gain a more holistic view of the issue. This is relevant to both RQ 2 and RQ 3. Identifying risk factors could help illuminate the challenges faced and inform effective measures that the government and NGOs could implement. The fourth gap relates to the assessment of intervention effectiveness. It is crucial to evaluate the impact of interventions through robust data to understand their effectiveness in

reducing violence against children (Child Protection Monitoring and Evaluation Reference Group, 2014). This aligns with both RQ1 and RQ3. Evaluating the effectiveness of government and NGO measures is crucial to determining how effectively CSA is being addressed.

The fifth gap emphasises the need for comprehensive epidemiological studies that provide representative data on various forms of violence beyond just sexual violence, highlighting the importance of a broader approach to understanding these issues (Child Protection Monitoring and Evaluation Reference Group, 2014). This gap is pertinent to RQ 1, as robust data can inform better strategies and interventions that organisations employ in response to CSA. Lastly, the sixth gap points to the importance of inclusive surveys that encompass both genders and address multiple types of violence and victimisation, recognising the similarities in experiences between boys and girls (Child Protection Monitoring and Evaluation Reference Group, 2014). This relates to RQ 2, which aims to ensure inclusive data collection to address CSA across the Maldives, regardless of children's gender.

In the meantime, this study also reviewed prior studies and addressed a few gaps, as summarised in Table 2.1 under Section 2.11. Prior to the study, the literature indicated a lack of standardization in reporting mechanisms and intervention protocols among government entities and NGOs. There were significant discrepancies in inter-agency responses and data-sharing processes, highlighting a fragmented approach to tackling CSA. Moreover, existing legislative frameworks, such as the Child Rights Act, were often unenforced or poorly applied, reflecting a gap in effective governance. In addition, past studies have identified significant obstacles hindering both governmental and NGO efforts to respond effectively to CSA. These include lack of funding, inadequate training of personnel, and cultural taboos surrounding abuse. Public distrust in institutions further complicated the response to CSA, leading to underreporting and ineffective case handling. Fragmentation of services due to poor inter-sectoral collaboration exacerbated the issues, leading to missed opportunities for timely intervention. Not only that, but the study highlighted that a lack of community involvement and awareness, insufficient trauma-informed care, and the absence of standardized educational programs for prevention often limited existing approaches to CSA in the Maldives. Prior research had not adequately addressed the potential for community-based interventions or strategies that engaged local leaders and communities in breaking the silence surrounding CSA.

Hence, in addressing the issues outlined in this problem statement, this study aims to explore the roles and effectiveness of the government and NGOs in preventing CSA in the Maldives. This study examines existing measures implemented, challenges to effective intervention, and effective approaches to improve the situation, ultimately contributing to our understanding of the complexities involved in protecting children from abuse and maltreatment. This study shed light on the report's findings by providing relevant and timely recommendations. This study believes that it will help mobilise collaborative action, nurture community awareness, and drive more effective efforts to end child sexual exploitation and abuse. Thus, this study provides policymakers, practitioners, and stakeholders with information to support their ongoing efforts to protect children and create a safe environment for all children in the Maldives.

1.3 Research Questions

The primary aim of this study is to explore the measures, challenges, and effective approaches used by government and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) to address CSA in the Maldives. This study then aims to answer three main research questions.

- 1) How do the Maldives' government and non-governmental organisations deal with the issue of CSA?
- 2) What challenges do the Maldives' government and non-governmental organisations face in dealing with CSA?
- 3) How does the Maldives' government effectively address the issue of CSA?

1.4 Research Objectives

In line with the abovementioned primary aim and research questions, this study proposes three research objectives, which are:

- 1) To examine the existing measures undertaken by the Maldives' government and non-governmental organisations in dealing with the CSA issue
- 2) To explore the challenges that the Maldives' government and non-governmental organisations face in dealing with CSA
- 3) To determine approaches for the Maldives' government to address the CSA issue effectively

1.5 Scope of Study

The scope of this study can be divided into several aspects. The first scope of this study concerns CSA, which was selected due to the ongoing worrying rise in reported cases each year across the Maldives. Such a serious issue is primarily because of the degree of risk faced by victims of CSA. This results in possible negative impacts on their mental and physical health, which can have long-term implications if not adequately addressed (Finkelhor et al., 2007). It also emphasises the importance of novel and creative intervention approaches and the necessity for governmental and non-governmental organisations to respond to CSA. It stresses the need to comprehend the adverse impacts of the intricacies of child sexual exploitation in society to promote the welfare and safety of vulnerable children, and also to provide appropriate protection and treatment.

Secondly, the geographic scope of this research is deliberately confined to the Maldives. This delimitation, while acknowledging the universality of Child Sexual Abuse (CSA) as a global public health crisis, is predicated on the unique and under-researched epidemiological and socio-cultural landscape of the archipelago. The rationale for this focus is threefold:

- **Systemic and Structural Deficits:** The Maldivian context is characterized by a critical disconnect between policy intent and practical enforcement. Centralized governance, with most authorities located in the capital, leads to the systemic neglect of abuse cases in the outer islands. This is compounded by a documented reluctance from national funding bodies to allocate necessary financial resources, crippling prevention and response efforts.
- **An Intractable Policy-Implementation Gap:** Despite the enactment of various national policies aimed at curbing CSA, statistical trends indicate a persistent and rising incidence. This discrepancy underscores a profound implementation failure and highlights the need for research that moves beyond legislative analysis to examine the on-the-ground barriers to effectiveness.
- **A Distinct Socio-Cultural Etiology:** The drivers of CSA in the Maldives are deeply embedded in its social fabric. A pervasive lack of public awareness, coupled with high poverty levels, renders children particularly vulnerable. Many lack the foundational knowledge to identify inappropriate behaviour, and those from impoverished socio-economic backgrounds are at heightened risk.

Crucially, this vulnerability is exacerbated by a long-standing association between abuse, societal status, and culturally specific notions of "honour," which silences victims and protects perpetrators.

Therefore, the Maldives represents not merely a geographic location but a critical case for examining the interplay between structural inadequacies, policy failures, and unique cultural determinants that perpetuate CSA.

The third scope is temporal delimitation. The study's temporal scope is delimited to a five-year prospective period. This timeframe is strategically selected to capture the implementation and initial efficacy of recent legislative and programmatic interventions in the Maldives, such as amendments to the Child Protection Act and the launch of new national strategies. While a longer horizon is needed to assess long-term outcomes, this five-year window provides a rigorous, actionable snapshot for policymakers and practitioners, enabling timely progress assessments and recalibrating strategies in the near term.

The fourth scope is the thematic and participant delimitation. The study's thematic focus is the institutional response to CSA, with a focus on the roles, measures, and challenges faced by key government agencies and non-governmental organisations (NGOs). While a multitude of stakeholders, including victims, families, and community members, are integral to the child protection ecosystem, this study explicitly examines the entities mandated to formally protect children. This includes a dedicated case study of Advocating Rights of Children (ARC), a leading NGO instrumental in operationalising legislation such as the Protection of the Rights of Children Act (No. 19/2019). By examining the strengths and limitations of these core institutions, the study illuminates the complexities of the national response. It identifies pathways to enhance inter-agency collaboration and improve practice.

The fifth scope is on the methodological approach. This study employs a qualitative research design, utilising in-depth, semi-structured interviews as the primary data collection strategy. This methodology was selected to generate rich, nuanced data from individuals with specialised knowledge and direct professional experience in child protection. The qualitative approach provides the necessary flexibility to explore participants' perspectives, lived experiences, and context-specific challenges in depth, offering insights that would be difficult to capture through quantitative methods alone. The analysis of these first-hand accounts will directly inform the development of more nuanced and effective interventions to combat CSA in the Maldives.

The sixth scope is on the theoretical framework. This study is underpinned by a tripartite theoretical framework comprising Institutional Theory, Ecological Systems Theory, and Social Learning Theory. This framework was deliberately constructed to provide distinct yet complementary analytical lenses.

- Institutional Theory elucidates how formal rules, norms, and cognitive structures within government and NGO sectors shape and at times constrain the systemic response to CSA, explaining gaps between policy intent and practical implementation.
- Ecological Systems Theory situates the phenomenon within nested socio-environmental systems (micro, meso, exo, and macro), emphasising that effective interventions must target multiple levels, from the family and community to broader societal norms.
- Social Learning Theory clarifies the behavioural dimension, explaining how norms related to CSA are transmitted and potentially transformed through processes of observation, imitation, and structured education.

Collectively, this integrated framework allows for a holistic analysis that conceptualises CSA not merely as a legal or individual failing, but as a complex outcome of institutional, environmental, and learned behavioural factors. It ensures a comprehensive investigation while maintaining a precise analytical focus on the Maldivian context.

1.6 Significance of this Study

The significance of this study can be discussed in four aspects. The first significance of this study was its focus on the roles and effectiveness of both government and non-governmental organisations in the Maldives in addressing CSA. By exploring their interactions, this study provided important insights into how these agents collaborated to address this urgent problem. This study emphasised the need for multisectoral efforts among service providers to respond to CSA effectively. These roles were valuable for identifying missing strategies and assessing the resilience of the underlying system in providing support services to victims. Therefore, this study contributed to broader discussions of child protection by offering insights into these dynamics. It highlights the need for a systematic approach to the protection of vulnerable Maldivian children from abuse.

The second significance of this study lies in its identification of the challenges faced by the Maldives' government and non-governmental organisations in their efforts to tackle CSA. This study identified qualitative obstacles to the deployment of successful intervention approaches, including resource constraints, social stigma, and limited understanding. Through this examination, the complexities and limitations these organisations encountered in dealing with CSA cases became clear. By identifying and articulating these challenges, this study aimed to inform stakeholders about practical solutions and strategies to improve their efforts to combat CSA and the broader ecosystem for children in the Maldives. Furthermore, this information was crucial for presenting the collaborative effort to address challenges and enhance child protection efforts in the region.

The third significance of this study was its contribution to understanding how the Maldives' government effectively addressed CSA. This study examined the approaches of the government and NGOs to child protection. It contributed to understanding the makeup of programs designed to protect children and respond to cases of abuse. This exercise highlighted the strengths and weaknesses of the government's response and identified effective models that could be expanded or replicated. By identifying effective practices, this study also aimed to provide recommendations for policymakers and practitioners in the child protection sector. However, this knowledge was vital in creating better legislative and programmatic responses to help victims of child sex abuse in the Maldives, better empowering the systems in place to safeguard children.

The fourth significance of this study was its potential to inspire greater awareness and advocacy of CSA in the Maldives. This work aimed to raise awareness about the need to address CSA by sharing the results with various stakeholders, including policymakers, community leaders, and non-governmental organisations. One is that there would be better awareness and perhaps more proactive steps in communities and attitudes in society that would encourage families to report abuse, not cover it up. These initiatives were key to breaking the silence and taboo around CSA in these settings, allowing locals to adopt an active role in the prevention of CSA. The results of this study could have played a crucial role in conversations about child welfare, rights, and cultural change. This thereby increases discussion and recognition of CSA and ultimately contributes to a safer future for all children in the Maldives.

1.7 Terminologies and Organisations' Clarification

This section clarifies the terminology used throughout this thesis.

1.7.1 Child Abuse

The Federal Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA), as amended by the CAPTA Reauthorization Act of 2010, defines child abuse and neglect as, at a minimum "Any recent act or failure to act on the part of a parent or caretaker which results in death, serious physical or emotional harm, sexual abuse or exploitation", or "An act or failure to act which presents an imminent risk of serious harm". This description of child exploitation and negligence precisely speaks of parents and other caretakers. A "child" in this description commonly refers to an individual who is under the age of 18 or who is not a free minor.

1.7.2 Child Sexual Abuse (CSA)

CSA is defined as sexual activity with a child by an adult, adolescent, or older child. If any adult engages in sexual activity with a child, that is sexual abuse.

1.7.3 Ministry of Gender, Family, and Social Services

The Ministry of Gender, Family, and Social Services protects the rights of vulnerable groups in the Maldives. Its primary responsibilities include women's rights and empowerment, gender equality, children's rights and family well-being, older adults' rights and well-being, disability rights and well-being, and social protection services.

1.7.4 Maldives Police Service

The Maldives Police Service is the civilian national police force of the Republic of Maldives. It is responsible for enforcing criminal and traffic laws, enhancing public safety, maintaining order, and maintaining peace throughout the country.

1.7.5 Children's Rights Commission

The Children's Rights Commission's mandate consists of investigating and assessing the present situation of all cases being handled by state parties and institutions tasked with the protection of children, including all cases of violence, neglect, abuse, exploitation, and cruelty. The Commission is also tasked with identifying and analysing the root cause of child abuse in the country, in addition to other factors such as motives, areas of prevalence, age groups of perpetrators, socio-economic factors, crime rates, susceptibility to violence, the present situation of victims, and accountability of state institutions in undertaking their responsibilities.

1.7.6 Children's Ombudspersons Office

On 23rd July 2020, President Ibrahim Mohamed Solih was appointed the First Child Rights Ombudsperson of the Maldives. The appointment of a Child Rights Ombudsperson was a crucial component of implementing the amended Child Rights Protection Act, which came into effect on 20th February 2020. The Ombudsperson is tasked with determining the extent to which institutions adhere to the Child Rights Protection Act and the Convention on the Rights of the Child, ensuring their implementation, and monitoring and evaluating institutions and personnel involved in protecting children's rights. A crucial aspect of the Ombudsperson's duties is the authority to regulate information communicated to the public, thereby protecting the child's privacy and security.

1.7.7 Peoples Majlis

The People's Majlis is the Maldives' unicameral legislative body. As the Constitution outlines, it can enact, amend, and revise laws. As of 2019, it had 87 members.

1.7.8 Advocating the Rights of Children (ARC)

Advocating the Rights of Children (ARC) is a non-governmental, non-partisan, non-profit organisation registered in the Maldives since December 2009. Its mission is to protect and promote the rights and well-being of children in the Maldives.

1.7.9 Hope for Women

Works towards ending all forms of violence against women while promoting gender equality and women's participation in public life.

1.8 Thesis Outline

Chapter 1: Introduction - The initial chapter presents the literature review for this study, establishes the research context, and formulates a problem statement that highlights the importance of CSA in the Maldives. It outlines the research questions that guide this study and the corresponding research objectives. Furthermore, this chapter outlines the study scope and explains why this examination is important for augmenting the current understanding of CSA and solution approaches. Moreover, it provides definitions of key terms and concepts needed for clarity and a common understanding, which are used throughout the thesis.

Chapter 2: Literature Review - The second chapter presents an exhaustive literature review on CSA internationally and in the context of the Maldives. This chapter discusses the factors that lead to CSA and relevant policies and acts concerning children and child protection. It outlines the roles and responsibilities of relevant authorities in addressing CSA, discusses their challenges, and reviews existing theoretical frameworks. This chapter concludes with a synthesis of the literature findings, which leads to the research methodology.

Chapter 3: Research Methodology - This chapter presents the research methodology to ensure transparency about the approach used to conduct this study. This chapter presents the philosophical basis that guided the research approach and describes the research design. It defines the unit of analysis, the subject of study, the sample size, and the sampling criteria and techniques. Additionally, this chapter explains the research instrument used for data collection, the systematic procedures followed, and the techniques employed for data analysis. This chapter concludes by examining the broader methodological framework underlying the validity of this study's results.

Chapter 4: Findings - This chapter presents the results obtained from the data analysis. It begins with an introduction that contextualises the findings, followed by a profile of the study participants. This chapter reviews existing measures and challenges,

suggesting that the Maldives' government can take effective steps to address CSA and lay the groundwork for further discussion in the next chapter.

Chapter 5: Discussion and Conclusion - The final chapter discusses the study's findings, tying them back to the three research objectives. This sentence concerns the discussion, which encompasses this study's objectives and results and relates them to the literature to draw a relevant conclusion. Lastly, this chapter contextualises the data with recommendations, drawn from the insights developed in this study, on how government and non-governmental organisations can proactively adapt and enhance their responses to CSA. It discusses certain limitations of this study and directions for future research and summarises the overall contributions of the thesis to the discussion of child sexual abuse in the Maldives.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

Child sexual abuse (CSA) is a pervasive issue affecting individuals worldwide, transcending cultural, economic, and social boundaries. This chapter presents a comprehensive literature review of CSA, focusing on its manifestations in the Maldives. The examination begins with an overview of CSA from an international perspective, followed by an exploration of the specific circumstances surrounding the issue within the Maldivian context. The multifaceted nature of CSA is addressed, considering individual, family, school, community, and national factors that contribute to its prevalence.

Furthermore, the chapter highlights existing policies and acts aimed at combating child abuse, as well as the roles and responsibilities of relevant authorities in addressing this critical concern. Given the devastating impact of CSA on victims and society, this chapter also addresses the challenges faced in addressing and dealing with such acts in the Maldives. Issues such as funding gaps, community education, and parental involvement underscore the need for a coordinated approach to prioritising child welfare. This study lays the groundwork for future interventions and studies aimed at effectively addressing this tragic phenomenon by exploring theoretical frameworks related to CSA.

2.2 Child Sexual Abuse (CSA) from an International Perspective

Child abuse is a significant problem in the world and must be studied thoroughly and understood (Amin et al., 2024). There is historical evidence that the mistreatment of children was an ongoing problem throughout different cultures and societies. The idea that people would seek to harm children is almost unimaginable, but this study reminds us every so often how commonplace these types of incidents can be. Often, these abuses are committed by a person familiar to the children, often in their own home, most often by a parent or other relative. Such familial relationships make it difficult for children to disclose these incidents, in part because children fear the abuser and in part because. After all, the abuser has exercised control over them.

Countries have different histories of recognising and responding to child abuse. In Malaysia, Hwang, Ching, and Leng (1971) acknowledged the presence of child abuse as far back as the 1970s. Similarly, a broader scope of discussion on child abuse was developed by Finkelhor and Korbin (1988). They presented child abuse as a global phenomenon and outlined an approach for the formulation of global policy initiatives related to child abuse. They suggested that any international definition of child abuse must satisfy some key goals. It should explicitly separate child abuse from social, economic, and health concerns of international scope and be adaptable enough to apply across different contextual settings. Such practices are reflected in approaches in the Maldives, Malaysia, and India. As already mentioned, sexual abuse of children as a whole, more so, is hidden mainly because of societal norms and values that do not want families to be disgraced.

Piolanti et al. (2025) evaluated global child sexual violence in their systematic review and meta-analysis. From 165 research studies involving 958,182 children in 80 nations, they found that 11.4% of children reported experiencing lifetime sexual harassment, and 8.7% reported contact sexual violence. The prevalence of completed forced sexual intercourse was 6.1%, with girls (6.8%) having a greater rate than boys (3.3%). This study also found considerable regional variations in prevalence rates and linked higher sexual violence reporting rates to older age, lower national income, and school-based surveys. The authors stress the importance of targeted research and policy measures to combat worldwide sexual violence against boys and girls.

In the article "Grooming and Child Sexual Abuse in Organisational Settings: An Expanded Role for International Human Rights Law," Johnson (2023) examines the occurrence of CSA within organisational contexts, emphasising the grooming process. This study challenges the common perception that grooming is only an online phenomenon, highlighting its occurrence in other settings such as educational institutions, sports organisations, and religious entities. The author analyses international and regional human rights legislation, incorporating directions from treaty-based human rights mechanisms to clarify existing rules around CSA and grooming. This study highlights the challenges in recognising and addressing grooming behaviours in these circumstances and advocates for strengthening international human rights standards to better protect children. Comprehensive rules and enhanced legal procedures are required to safeguard children from sexual assault in institutional settings.

Hailes et al. (2020) systematically analysed existing meta-analyses to evaluate the correlations between CSA and long-term psychiatric, psychosocial, and physical health outcomes. The principal conclusions were about the mental outcomes where CSA was associated with a heightened risk of multiple mental illnesses, including depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and schizophrenia. The psychosocial outcomes show that individuals with a history of childhood sexual abuse demonstrated elevated rates of substance abuse, self-injury, and hazardous sexual practices, and the physical health outcomes indicated that CSA is correlated with several physical health complications, including chronic pain, obesity, and cardiovascular disorders. The review highlights the significant and lasting effects of CSA on multiple facets of health and well-being. It underscores the imperative for prompt treatments and robust support structures to alleviate these detrimental effects.

Finkelhor and Korbin (1988) defined child abuse as "the portion of harm to children that is due to human behaviour that is deemed illegal, proximate and preventable." They described six dimensions of abuse in children: intentionality, social sanction versus social censure, international consensus, social versus individual causation, children as joint victims versus children as sole victims, and the personhood of the child. In addition, the authors pointed out that CSA takes different forms. They also covered the subject of parent-child sexual involvement, once considered very rare, but reported to involve as many as 1 in 20 female children in this country whose fathers or stepfathers are somewhat abusive.

Despite variations among studies, it was estimated that, during his/her childhood, one in four girls and one in three boys in the United States would experience CSA (CDC 24/7). Disturbingly, 91% of CSA cases were perpetrated by people who were known and trusted by the child. Moreover, the estimated cost of CSA to the USA in 2015, over a victim's lifetime, was \$9.3 billion. In the Maldives, several cases have emerged of great-grandfathers, grandfathers, and fathers sexually abusing their children. One especially shocking case surfaced in 2020, where both a great-grandfather and a grandfather sexually abused their two-year-old granddaughter.

The parents of the child were reported to be drug addicts, and the older relatives had long been identified as sexual predators, a sordid secret in the close-knit island community. Interestingly, the child's grandfather was a muezzin in the local mosque, and it was rumoured that his wife had left him over his history of abuse of their children. This was discovered when the child presented with abdominal pain at Atoll Hospital,

where the injuries were found to have been irreversible and the result of multiple men raping the child. The examination took six hours, and the attending physician, upon hearing the grim details, expressed horror at the barbarity of the situation. Two days later, the offenders were arrested, and a court granted authorities a remand of the 62- and 82-year-olds for 15 days. This was soon followed by the arrest of the child's 33-year-old father (Aruma, 2020).

Comparative examples exist here in Singapore; the CNA news reported several highly publicised court cases on incestuous sexual abuse, mostly revolving around father figures (Yeoh, 2021). According to reports in India, a 42-year-old man was arrested for having repeatedly raped his 14-year-old daughter since 2014, using threats with a sickle or axe to enforce compliance. The accused have been booked under multiple IPC sections, including 376 (rape) and the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act. A 16-year-old was pressured to leave Kuala Lumpur without a permit during the COVID-19 Movement Control Order and was detained when found by the police. She had run away to her mother in Kedah because her father, her custodian, had sexually abused her for months, she told the court.

The number of cases of sexual crimes against children, for example, as many as 1,721, was recorded in the first six months of 2020. According to Yeo (2021), 95% of CSA cases involve someone known to the victims. According to Datuk Dr Amar Singh, a consultant paediatrician with decades of experience working with sexually abused children, the primary abuser in Malaysia is the father, the secondary abuser is the father, and the secondary abuser is also the father (Yeo, 2021). Although the evidence is scarce and often anecdotal, it is clear that CSA cuts across cultures. People in charge of child protection abuse their powers to have abusive relationships with minors. In the Western world, it is especially common for extended family, such as uncles, brothers, teachers, and caregivers, to be included as perpetrators of this abuse (Childlight, 2025; Korbin, 1987). Rape is another type of CSA in which children experience violent sexual offences by unknown or lesser-known perpetrators (foreigners) in the same situations. This kind of abuse creates a widespread culture of fear among families (Childlight, 2025).

The phenomenon of child prostitution takes on different forms in different countries. Childlight (2025) reported that, in some cases, children are being bought from their parents or relatives by paedophiles, for example. In India, the poor sell their daughters, and children playing on the road are often kidnapped and prostituted. In

March 2021, the Indian Express reported on a 12-year-old girl who was allegedly kidnapped in January 2022 and forced into prostitution. She was rescued two months later after her family alleged that the accused were their neighbours and that the local police had not taken action on the kidnapping case.

Furthermore, a psychologist who deals with sexually abused children said they now have child prostitution in the Maldives. Maldivians were allegedly charged \$45.60 (700 Maldivian Rufiyaa) for sex with a child, and Bangladeshi workers around \$9.77 (150 Rufiyaa). By then, the clientele tended to be between 21 and 25, primarily young men. Additionally, family members often make arrangements for these exploitative services on behalf of the children (Maione, 2013). The Ministry of Martyrdom of Gender reviewed this issue by examining three cases of prostitution against minors submitted in September 2019.

This concern about CSA has emerged in various contexts around the world, including in stores in the Netherlands. This location is where CSA rapporteur Bolhaar stated that she had noticed failures by the Dutch government to act adequately on such issues, particularly those highlighted through social media. The attention to spice disorders was widespread, as Bolhaar joined researchers around Denmark and beyond who contribute to a better understanding of the problems related to such abuse, which are considered illegal drugs and are prohibited in many Western nations (Primka et al, 2019). As a culture, with words lost to the ancient and renewed habit of spice-engaging drugs, Bolhaar's millennium members reminded her it was all too easy for them to laugh about the same drugs they were using all over again, making new attempts to keep the demand weak by focusing on Chinese street drugs. Bolhaar found this approach pigeonholing "the million-dollar problem", or at least the million-flavour problem (Ralor, 2019).

Kewley et al. (2025) and Daley et al. (2025) stated that some CSA actions are obvious. However, it is essential that these actions are the best ideas of the world community and that they maximise the chances of success in eliminating the dangers to children's health, development, and survival. Widely used internationally, Articles 19 and 34 of the CRC outlined a framework for condemning all forms of abuse of children, including sexual abuse. While the definitions drafted by the CRC are not definitive, the Convention encouraged signatory nations to adopt comprehensive definitions to address these matters.

Protecting children became an important cause in the global North in the late 19th century, followed by a documented history of child exploitation. Conversely, the contemporary chapter on child abuse and protection of the global South started mainly the day the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child commenced in 1989 (Jabeen, 2013). The Washington Post — November 21, 2014 "Why Won't the US Ratify the UN Child Rights Treaty?" On a global scale, the CRC, a landmark treaty widely regarded as a major human rights achievement, has been ratified by 190 United Nations member states.

The CRC is the most detailed international treaty ever created to protect children's rights and evolved from the 1959 Declaration of the Rights of the Child. Three member countries of the United Nations, such as Somalia, South Sudan, and the United States, have not yet ratified the CRC. A group opposing the signing of the CRC, known as the United States Against Domestic Enabling (US ADE), asserted that the greatest danger of the convention is that it could undermine American self-governance associated with the constitutional process.

The group contended that the Constitution grants state governments sole authority to enact laws and policies to protect families and children. Ratifying the convention would legally bind the nation under international law to adhere to standards developed by the United Nations and the CRC. The oppressive hypothesis argues that American children and families (as a whole) would benefit more from organisations governed by the democratic process than by international rules and regulations, citing concerns that ratification would, among other things, let children choose their religion; grant legally enforceable rights to leisure; impose greater expenditures on child welfare than on national defence; or involve government narrowcasting of parenting decisions affecting children.

An example is the qualitative study by Khamala et al. (2019), which found no specific recommendations for service providers in Kenya on supporting children who have experienced CSA at the institutional level. Khamala et al. (2019) also found that service providers play a vital role in ensuring that survivors receive comprehensive support, including clinical, medicolegal, and psychological care, as well as access to justice. However, they struggled to overcome factors listed in the report, such as a lack of transportation, insufficient coordination between providers, corruption among officials, and damaging patriarchal standards that deterred reporting of abuse. This study recommends that the government commit to funding professional development,

supervision, and a safe working environment for service providers to enhance their support of survivors.

The Maldives faces the same problem, especially given the lack of trained professional service providers. In the Ministry of Gender, very few staff members had the necessary skills. Interviews with staff revealed a lack of information and resources for running training programs. At the same time, the NGO Advocating the Rights of Children (ARC) put forward several CSA awareness and children's rights initiatives that received little to no support from local or federal governments. The NGO Child Rights Connect stresses that NGOs are uniquely placed to monitor the impact of state actions in meeting these State obligations under the CRC and to assess that impact.

In the Maldives, ARC 2015 submitted an "Alternative Report on the Implementation of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Children", which recommended the establishment of adequate mechanisms that include standard operating procedures in managing the child helpline and extensive training for staff who receive calls from the helpline, promoting the helpline to report suspected cases of abuse. Since this submission, no additional reports have been made by the government or non-governmental organisations on issues of child abuse. Additionally, no analyses on this issue have been published since 2015.

Maldives NGOs often play an advocacy role and usually do not engage in policymaking concerning child abuse cases. According to the CRC, it is essential to collaborate with NGOs, as they advocate for children and help agencies align their work with society's needs. With such cooperation, policies can be better designed to reflect our best interests. While there are positive developments in NGOs and the government getting involved in designing public policy, a critical nexus between these two players is missing, particularly in their communication when addressing CSA in the Maldives.

In summary, child abuse, including CSA, is a global priority that needs policy attention from all sectors of society, and not just governments. Moreover, as seen in the Maldives, efforts to combat child abuse lack the necessary tools and personnel. This situation shows that greater investment in infrastructure, training, and collaborative policymaking is essential to creating an environment that supports and protects at-risk children. Information and techniques from other parts of the world, combined with compliance with applicable international frameworks (e.g., promoting the CRC), can lead to long-term solutions for protecting the most vulnerable members of society.

2.3 Child Sexual Abuse (CSA) in the Maldives

Sexuality in the Maldives was systematically tied to social status and ideas of "honour" for a long time. In cases of child sexual harassment or rape, many felt embarrassment more than anger. However, CSA in the Maldives was particularly prevalent in cases involving incest, according to Ibrahim (2018). Research indicated that children were abused by family members or relatives more often than by strangers. Moreover, public knowledge about human rights, in particular, grew significantly in 2006. Until this moment, most people were reluctant to recognise the problem of sexual assault, which plagued not only their children but others as well. Though the social stigma surrounding CSA began to be discussed (Kamis & Copeland, 2024; Ibrahim, 2018), many families failed to acknowledge the abuse, denying it or attempting to contain it. While CSA might now be increasingly talked about, most families still choose to ignore or deny it.

Awareness of CSA may have risen somewhat, but social conditioning discourages reporting such incidents to authorities. Over the past few years, the Maldives has compounded its investment in child protection. When it signed and ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1991, it became one of the very first countries to do so, marking the beginning of a path towards seeing children as people with rights rather than property. Still, child sexual abuse is a significant global problem. In 2009, Engelhardt and Jayasuriya conducted a national study in the Maldives that highlighted the prevalence of violence against children in both the home and school settings. The same trends were reported in the 2017 data from Malaysia's Ministry of Women, Family, and Community Development.

It was also reported that 15% of secondary school students in the Maldives reported having experienced sexual abuse at least once in their lives, and girls were more likely than boys to be victims of such abuse. To make things worse, a report from UNICEF showed flagrant problems in the legal system, where, at times, victims were blamed for what happened before the abuse. Notably, victims would undergo penal proceedings only when the perpetrator had denied guilt and when prosecutors could not present four witnesses (National Study on Violence Against Children, UNICEF collaboration with the Ministry of Gender and Family, 2009). This systemic failure added to the trauma encountered by victims and often discouraged families from seeking justice.

From 2017 to 2020, on average, 1,074 cases of sexual assault were reported to the Ministry of Gender and Family Services, and a total of 1,353 cases were reported to the Maldives Police Services during this time. This variation in reported abuse cases revealed possible miscommunication between the organisations about handling child abuse. If, for example, a child had been abused in a family with several siblings, the Ministry of Gender would declare all siblings vulnerable and report them. In contrast, the Maldives Police Service would report only the victim. The use of these different reporting practices made it difficult to adequately assess the prevalence of child sexual abuse and the resources required to counter it.

Statistics from the Ministry of Gender and Family Services in 2021 showed that sexual abuse cases decreased to 203 cases compared to 282 cases in 2020. This trend indicates that children's welfare is now becoming a growing concern amongst families. However, despite a population of around 540,542 people, few were willing to report a case of child abuse, as there was a lack of trust in authorities. In 2015, Transparency Maldives published an article, "A Troubled Future for Democracy." The article indicated that many citizens did not have faith in principal state institutions, such as the courts and Parliament. Notably, 51% of Maldivians reported no confidence whatsoever in the judiciary, up from 46% in 2013. Most eminently, lack of trust was one of the main ways in which child abuse remained hidden.

CSA cases have also arisen worldwide, showing a troubling pattern. One report highlighted the case of an 18-year-old girl from the Morena district of Madhya Pradesh. She accused her father of raping her during the 2020 COVID pandemic while her mother allegedly helped him silence her. Even though she was locked in a room to prevent her from escaping, the girl managed to escape to her aunt's house. They sent her back to her house, where the abuse continued. Once, she escaped when her older sister found out and called the police. The girl had marks on her body following the abuse, and she also reported that the abuse had been ongoing since she was in high school; both of these are indicators that there were some severe systemic failures in protecting children.

Another more recent case was of a 16-year-old boy being sexually abused by two men (Mahkthoom, 2020). According to a police report obtained from the North Police Division, which encompasses the Noonu, Raa, Baa, and Lhaviyani atolls, two men, aged 28 and 37, were arrested for the crime on June 19, 2020. A further incident on June 10 in which an 11-year-old was reportedly raped, exercised the hands of Police

Commissioner Mohamed Hameed to request the detention of a 38-year-old male until the trial's conclusion. While many women were now "locked in" with their abusers in the COVID-19 lockdown, some NGOs and advocates working on issues of gender-based violence and childcare rights expressed concern that this had put them at increased risk of violence.

Additional reports documented another abuse incident. In May 2020, a 16-year-old girl was ferried from an island to Male, the capital of the Maldives, and detained in a guest house and raped. She was threatened and blackmailed during her ordeal. The case was finally brought to the attention of the Maldives Police Service on 28 May 2020, resulting in the arrest of a 24-year-old male. Investigations found that the girl's parents had sent her to an individual in Male, whom neither she nor her parents knew, putting her life in great danger. In that case, the financial incentives for blackmail and threats only worsened the situation.

Following the above incidents, the local non-government organisation named Advocating the Rights of Children (ARC) demanded stricter actions to prevent sexual abuse, rape, and the exploitation of children in guesthouses across the nation. ARC described the recent cases of rape involving 11- and 16-year-olds, which allegedly took place at guesthouses in Male City, in a statement as "very dangerous". The NGO expressed concern about the Ministry of Tourism's failure to regulate registered guesthouses comprehensively and about the growing number of unregulated, unregistered room rentals. With more and more children being moved around for exploitation, the ARC recommended that laws and regulations on transportation be amended in line with the concerns of minor trafficking.

It also emphasised the need for relevant agencies to conduct in-depth investigations under sections 122 to 126 of the Child Rights Act 2019, which provided the punishment for offences against children, such as exploitation, grooming, negligence, and inability to protect a child from harm. ARC said it restated its concerns as the issue of violence against children continues to be prevalent, based on systemic weaknesses of the child protection system. It also called on parents and the community to be vigilant in protecting children against violence, abuse, and exploitation by rapidly reporting cases of suspicious activity.

According to an article published by India Today, it was reported that a 13-year-old boy had been compelled to undergo a sex-change operation in Delhi's Geeta Colony area before being repeatedly gang-raped by as many as six men for several months. The

Delhi Commission for Women was informed of the incident, and an FIR was registered, initiating the investigation. The victims had met these accused while performing a dance show in Delhi. They became friends with him and said they would teach him other forms of dance, and subsequently raped him. At 13, the victim said, he was drunk and was later given hormonal treatments that changed his appearance. The accused raped him several times and exploited him sexually by bringing clients. They finally forced the victim to beg on the streets for the possibility of harm to himself and his family, demonstrating the extent of violence and exploitation children are facing in different fields.

2.4 Factors Contributing to Child Sexual Abuse (CSA)

Understanding the factors contributing to CSA is crucial for developing effective prevention strategies and interventions. This section examines the multifaceted factors that contribute to the occurrence of CSA at individual, family, school, community, and national and international levels. Each level offers a distinct perspective for examining the complexities of CSA.

2.4.1 Individual Level

Individual-level factors related to CSA are prominently observed, particularly among children. Studies suggest that children with disabilities are at a higher risk of sexual abuse. Victims of violence against children are often children themselves, and the United Nations Study on Violence Against Children noted that these vulnerable subjects are a common target in school environments (Antonowicz, 2010). More marginalised children and those with poor relationships with their parents and peers are at increased risk of sexual abuse from teachers and other children (Antonowicz, 2010). There are immense challenges in parenting a special needs child, and they need to be addressed with the family and community. Sadly, many parents may unwittingly neglect their children in this way, making them more vulnerable to abuse.

Any child abuse, no matter how it happens, also negatively impacts the child in many ways. Physical, emotional, or psychological effects can result from scissored forms of abuse. Short-term impacts of abuse are most often easier to diagnose. On the other hand, long-term effects are generally more complex to identify initially. These unresolved problems may gradually come into view as the child develops (Adam,

2017). Suppose the child does not access medical treatment or emotional support. In that case, the effects of the abuse can follow them into adult life and hinder their ability to form and maintain healthy relationships.

For example, people who are exposed to any form of abuse as children carry an increased risk of becoming abusers in adulthood because of their previous traumas (Adam, 2017). It highlights the necessity of a multifaceted approach to the treatment of abuse, as unaddressed trauma can lead to systemic issues with victims that affect society at large. Supporting resilience in children at risk of abuse, including those with disabilities or social marginalisation, requires addressing the systemic causes of their vulnerability and their protection and well-being. Empowering families with education and support can significantly contribute to preventing CSA.

2.4.2 Family Level

Parental factors significantly contribute to child abuse, particularly among individuals who marry and become parents at a young age, often lacking a proper socialisation process in child-rearing. These parents have no idea what conditions their children should live in or what they should provide for them. Furthermore, parents who are encountering the challenges of daily life may have anger management problems, which can cause them to abuse their children physically. The victims spend their lives living in the shadows of the trauma of being abused as a child. Most of the time, poverty is a major contributor to programs to help families in poverty prevent their children from having negative behaviours and child abuse. Moreover, marital discord can create emotional disturbances in children and increase the likelihood of negative developmental changes. As Antonowicz (2010) suggested, sexual abuse is a continuum of abuse and maltreatment, rooted in poverty.

Seema and Shalini (2020) reported that CSA is commonly seen in lower-income families. Their study highlighted that low-income families in India sometimes sell their children to survive and cope with their day-to-day food needs. In these extreme cases, parents may abuse their children by forcing them into paid labour, even up to the point of engaging in illegal activities, such as drug or sex trafficking. Many young girls are seen dancing at local district bars, where they are paid for shows, only to be sexually abused behind closed doors. As unfortunate as this reality seems, poverty leads to kids

being used as criminals, workers, and servants, and public action should prevent this from happening to children.

Male, the capital of the Maldives, is densely populated, with numerous construction projects underway and cramped living conditions. Many islanders move to Male, seeking better lives, and rent small one-room apartments for their families, often sending their children to live with people who rent out their space in shared accommodations. Although the parents' best intentions drive this arrangement, these choices can inadvertently endanger their children's safety and health. For example, when youth relocate from the islands, they may be easy prey for the owners of the houses they are placed in temporarily. In some families living in Male, children even have to sleep in the same room as their parents, inadvertently seeing or hearing sexual activities. According to Adam (2017), this exposure could have severe emotional and psychological effects on these children that make them open to being victims of abuse.

Children who reside in single-parent families are at a higher risk of being sexually abused than children who live in a stable two-parent family (Richter, Dawes & Higson-Smith, 2007). Kinship or single-parent families provide children with greater freedom and less parental supervision, resulting in exposure to risk and neglect. Moreover, emotional neglect is prevalent, filling the void for validation and support from those outside their homes. Moreover, an alcohol-dependent parent often ends up ignoring their children, putting them in harm's way. Domestic violence is another layer of this cycle of fighting that can lead to divorce or family separation. High divorce rates in the Maldives result in cases where children can be separated from one of their parents or the other. This can leave children more vulnerable and at risk of abuse if they are not in a stable home environment.

The Maldives has one of the highest rates of divorce in the world, with children often being split between one parent (Mohamed & Riyaz, 2024; Shanoora et al., 2020). It is good to note that sexual abuse is not limited to fathers. One of the alarming cases was a 15-year-old girl who had been sexually abused by her stepfather (Independent News, 2013). It turned into a crisis when authorities found the body of a baby, which the girl had delivered, buried outside their house on Feydhoo Island in June 2012. The stepfather was charged with multiple counts, including sexual abuse of a minor, possession of porn, and being involved in a homicide. The mother was charged with concealing a crime. In a nightmarish episode, the minor girl was even booked under

the draconian law of "fornication", which can only be described as a horrifying societal reaction to someone who had just experienced sexual violence.

Moreover, Maldivian authorities were unwilling to provide the details of the girl's charges and whether they were related to the alleged abuse by her stepfather (Independent News, 2013). Abbas Faiz, a researcher for Amnesty International Maldives, blasted the victim's treatment, stressing that victims of sexual abuse or rape deserve support and counselling, not criminal charges. If the girl had been convicted, she could have spent until her 18th birthday under house arrest and then faced punitive measures under Maldivian law, including flogging. According to a report issued by the Maldivian Department of Judicial Administration on January 8, 2013, it was confirmed that charges had been filed against the girl. However, no case was pending before the juvenile court. This is underscoring inherent procedural violations in the treatment of sexual abuse victims and calling for the reform of the justice system.

2.4.3 School Level

CSA in the school context: a cross-sectional study. Alarming, perpetrators are often educators, particularly those who act as Quran teachers or Islamiyya instructors. One of the most striking examples happened on March 24, 2021, on a Maldivian island, when a 14-year-old girl was sexually assaulted by her class teacher. The horrifying incident presents a concerning reminder of the vulnerability of children in schools, which should be places of safety and nurturance. Medical examinations of the victim, however, had been conducted and confirmed sexual abuse, an unidentified person said. Such a revelation underscores the importance of effective, well-supported school reporting structures in protecting children from egregious acts. After the incident, the island's counsellor stated that the relevant authorities were taking the necessary steps, including investigating the matter. For examples are the Maldives Police Service and the Ministry of Gender, Family, and Social Services. Such a response catapulted education to a central role in addressing the urgent need to deal with CSA.

2.4.4 Community Level

Cultural practices play a significant role at the community level in CSA, as men usually construct meanings and values shared in a society and passed down across generations. As Yu (2024) and Schein (2010) implied, culture conveys stability and rigidity, shaping how individuals are expected to think, feel, and behave within a particular society or organisation. Individuals are socialised into these norms and expectations through multiple socialisation experiences, which become prescribed behaviour meant to uphold social order. This cultural context can result in an atmosphere where abuse can be either minimised or ignored, thwarting important conversations around such pertinent topics.

Then there is also the issue of shame and stigma at the community or society level (Kamis & Copeland, 2024; Ibrahim, 2018), where families may not want to come forward about abuse in the family without having such support. When CSA occurs, for example, many families do not report or talk about it because they are afraid of societal stigma and repercussions. This silence not only fails to provide victims with the support that they need, but it often continues the cycles of abuse where problems remain hidden and unresolved. As such, there is an overwhelming demand for communities to break the silence surrounding these cultural taboos through open-ended discussions and ensure the protection of those who are vulnerable.

2.4.5 National and International Level

National media exposure significantly contributes to CSA. All devices and platforms are used for communication or entertainment. For instance, computers, mobile phones, and the Internet are used to consume content on those devices. All three factors (computers, mobile phones, and the Internet) are important parts of children's lives in the modern world. With the current technology, sexually exploitative materials can be accessed instantly. Thus, it increases the opportunities for habitual sexual offenders to commit sexual offences. A disturbing trend emerges in which late children are exposed to comprehensive content before attempting to recreate those experiences and engage in such behaviour with their younger siblings (Dehlmer, 2009). Having this type of content so readily available calls into question how media consumption can

affect the behaviours of children and adolescents, as this type of dynamic can lead to exploitation and abuse at home.

Technology has developed rapidly, changing how societies and families interact; this change has consequently transformed daily life for children and adolescents. According to Dehlmer (2009), contemporary learners are accustomed to having multiple technological devices, such as computers, cell phones, video games, and various types of online content. These developments offer significant advantages for education and connectivity, but also present serious risks that children may not fully comprehend. The presence of technology in our lives makes harmful materials widely available, creating a culture of inappropriate behaviour and exploitation. There are thousands of forms of media that children are exposed to that have harmful social vices, and young children are very impressionable and vulnerable to copying techniques that they see. Thus, raising awareness of these media risks remains the most important step in protecting children and ensuring that technology becomes a positive force in their lives.

This phenomenon corresponds to Albert Bandura's 1977 Social Learning Theory, which emphasises the importance of observational learning in child development. This theory suggests that children learn by observing, remembering, and then imitating the behaviours of those around them. A few things about this method of learning can be pretty damaging, especially when children are exposed to toxic or harmful content. It can induce behaviours of imitation that raise vulnerability to CSA. When children and teenagers see their elders in the media behaving in ways that are not supportive of others, they internalise those attitudes and behaviours. Additionally, the growing availability of pornographic material in the mass media engenders a cycle of vulnerability and victimisation. Therefore, it is essential to invest in effective strategies and interventions that address the risks associated with media exposure while promoting healthier behaviours among children and adolescents in a media-saturated environment.

2.5 Policies and Acts Related to Child Abuse and Child Sexual Abuse (CSA)

Internationally, these include Articles 19 and 34 of the CRC, which have enabled countries to condemn child abuse, including sexual abuse. The CRC was ratified by the Maldives government in 1991, and separate legislation was enacted to strengthen the protection of children's rights. Regarding the Law on the Protection of

Children, Chapter 1: General Principles, Article 12, no information regarding children may be disclosed. The first provision of this section highlights the confidentiality of the identities and details concerning children who may be victims of sexual abuse or exploitation. Moreover, Article 16 of Chapter II (Duties of Parents) obliges special care to be taken to prevent actions that threaten the integrity of children, including sexual abuse and exploitation. They must promptly report any knowledge or suspicion of these acts to the appropriate government authority.

The Special Provisions to Deal with Child Sex Abuse Offenders (Act Law No. 12/2009) was enacted in 2009 to handle CSA better. This Act provided special matters related to the imprisonment of those accused of sexual abuse of children during investigation or trial. It also underscored the need for post-release mechanisms, based on the assigned mechanisms, to monitor abusers. The Act established a lower standard of proof for the admissibility of evidence, allowing various forms of evidence to be introduced in CSA cases. In addition, its objective was to lay down mechanisms for awarding compensation to children subjected to abuse. Thus, it provides a more robust legal framework for safeguarding children.

Chapter One, Introduction and Objectives of the Act, highlights the Act's main objectives, which are to shield children from perceived risks by holding suspected child sex offenders in custody throughout investigations and court proceedings and to safeguard children from re-offending once the sex offender is released from prison. The Act also aimed to enforce a uniform methodology for the state to control and monitor child sexual offenders. It also sought to reduce the threshold of evidence required in court so that fresh forms of evidence could be used in establishing cases of sexual abuse of children. As a result, the legislation imposed harsh penalties on abusers and conspirators. This situation made it easier to recover damages to child victims and allowed for public disclosure of who abused children.

Chapter Two, Child Sexual Abuse Law, defines several offences. The offence of sexual acts with a child is defined in Clause 3, which provides that a person is guilty of an offence if the person touches the body of a child with the intention of sexual gratification. "Touching with sexual intent" is described as actions performed on any part of the child's body that might be considered to be related to sexual satisfaction. Consequently, those convicted of such crimes are imprisoned for ten to fourteen years. This provision ensures that sexual offences against minors are taken seriously by the legal system by imposing severe penalties.

The offence of engaging a child in sexual activities is addressed in Clause 4, which states that a person commits the offence if they cause a child to engage in sexual activities. Those convicted of this crime receive prison sentences (from ten to fourteen years, depending on whether the defendant is an adult or child), highlighting the legal system's protection of children against sexual exploitation. Furthermore, Clause 5 also lists the willful commission of sexual acts in front of a child as a crime. Those who display such content to a child or expose the child to these materials face seven to ten years in prison. This clause reads as a strong legal commitment to protect children from exposure to such harmful sexual content.

In addition, Clause 6 concerns offences where a child is encouraged or coerced to look at an explicit sexual activity. Those who "forced the child to watch sexual acts performed by others or the child, or to watch pornographic records" were issued a penalty of between seven and ten years in prison. Such a provision is significant in acknowledging the psychological toll of such exposure on at-risk kids. Clause 7 also deals with sexual attacks by minors, stating that minors who commit the offences specified are held responsible, regardless of age. For anyone over thirteen, the consequence could be five years of detention in a proper facility, and for younger minors, parental involvement might be necessary in their rehabilitation.

In conclusion, the Special Provisions to Deal with Child Sex Abuse Offenders (Act Law No. 12/2009) was a significant step in the political and legal framework of child protection in the Maldives. It is indicative of a dedication to protecting children from sexual violence and exploitation, with the key principle being the need to balance this with the child victims' need for confidentiality and support. Any laws of this nature must be reviewed in production. However, their effectiveness must be tracked over time to make sure that they are reducing children's exposure to harm and holding abusers to account. The progressive development of laws in the Maldives addressing the urgent issue of CSA signals a proactive approach to tackling the complex issue, while ensuring that the protection and well-being of children remain at the forefront. This ongoing legal evolution emphasizes both preventive measures and robust protections to safeguard children and support affected individuals.

2.6 Roles and Responsibilities of Relevant Authorities

In the Maldives, the Ministry of Gender, Family and Social Services, the Maldives Police Service, the Children's Ombudsperson's Office, the Children's Rights Commission, and an NGO, ARC, are among the agencies involved in CSA. The following details their roles and responsibilities.

2.6.1 Ministry of Gender, Family, and Social Services

The Ministry of Gender, Family, and Social Services protects the rights of vulnerable groups in the Maldives. The primary responsibilities include promoting women's rights and empowerment, advancing gender equality, enhancing child and family well-being, promoting the rights and well-being of older adults, addressing disability rights and well-being, and providing social protection services. The Ministry works to promote and protect children's rights and the well-being of families in the Maldives. They have a special focus on the prevention of violence against children and the promotion of child participation.

The Ministry also collaborates with relevant stakeholders to establish Community Social Groups (CSGs) at the island level, aiming to identify and support vulnerable children and families. The vision is to enrich the lives of children, women, the elderly, and persons with disabilities in the Maldives. The missions are (1) to improve the lives of children, women, the elderly, and persons with disabilities with programmes and services that inform, educate, and empower them; (2) to provide immediate support and protection to those affected by neglect, abuse, and violence; (3) to strengthen legislative and institutional services by cultivating values of mutual respect, peace, and equality; and (4) to create and strengthen partnerships with local and international bodies to work towards the rights of vulnerable groups (<https://gender.gov.mv/>).

The roles and responsibilities of the Ministry of Gender, Family, and Social Services are as follows:

- 1) Provide and revoke registration and permits for social service providers, formulate and implement guidelines and standards for facilities and services, and regulate fees.

- 2) Provide registration and permits for social service workers, formulate and implement guidelines for service provision, assess and ensure maintenance of standards, monitor and take necessary action against violations of ethics and code of conduct.
- 3) Plan, monitor, and acquire resources to implement policies on protecting the well-being of women, children, the elderly, and persons with disabilities.
- 4) Establish a National Child Protection mechanism, and review and monitor the implementation of its work.
- 5) Ensure social protection for women, children, the elderly, and persons with disabilities.
- 6) Coordinate with relevant state institutions and conduct social protection programs in partnership with state and civil society organisations at the atoll and island level to protect and promote the rights of women, children, the elderly, and persons with disabilities.
- 7) Coordinate with relevant authorities to protect the rights of women, children, the elderly, and persons with disabilities, identify emerging issues, and work towards solutions to address such issues.
- 8) Create public awareness on safeguarding the rights of women, children, the elderly, and persons with disabilities, promote gender equality, strengthen family ties, and enhance parenting skills.
- 9) Facilitate providing social, psychological, and legal services to persons reporting deprivation of rights resulting from gender discrimination or violence.
- 10) Establish procedural guidelines and coordinate with relevant stakeholders to provide social protection to children, women, the elderly, and persons with disabilities suffering from various forms of abuse.
- 11) Establish state care institutions to provide protection and services for vulnerable women, children, the elderly, and persons with disabilities, or facilitate and monitor the provision of services through private organisations.
- 12) Collaborate with and provide guidance and support to private entities and organisations that work to protect children and families.
- 13) Investigate cases of child abuse and protect state care institutions for children who have no other means of primary care.
- 14) Establish a fostering mechanism; arrange to place children under state care with foster families and monitor their well-being.

- 15) Provide rehabilitation services to children in state care with disciplinary issues by having them participate in educational, skills development, and training programs at the Education and Training Centre for Children, and monitoring their behavioural changes.
- 16) Make necessary arrangements to provide psychosocial support during emergencies and disasters.
- 17) Provide psychosocial support and basic needs to women and girls who are victims of abuse.
- 18) Strengthen and develop services provided by the Ministry and relevant sectors by seeking guidance and assistance, and enhancing collaboration with international organisations to advance the interests of the Maldives.
- 19) Implement and fulfil obligations relevant to the Ministry's mandate, under International Treaties and Conventions to which the Maldives is a party. Report to treaty bodies, review and address issues identified during research, and bring them to the attention of relevant stakeholders.
- 20) Conduct and promote a culture of research and authorise, monitor, and maintain the quality and ethics of research in relevant areas.
- 21) Formulate and monitor the implementation and outcomes of plans to attain the Ministry's mission and objectives.
- 22) Formulate guidelines for the Ministry's data collection, develop and strengthen information technology resources, establish databases, and maintain, analyse, and publish records.
- 23) Encourage the inclusion of age, gender, and other disaggregated data in data collection from all fields.
- 24) Formulate guidelines for the Ministry's record keeping and archives, and facilitate easy access to information to the public through media and other means.
- 25) Monitor and implement the legal responsibilities related to the mandate of the Ministry of Gender and Family.

(<https://gender.gov.mv/>)

The following institutions are also managed by the Ministry of Gender, Family, and Social Services:

- 1) Fiyavathi, Hulhumale'
- 2) Kudakudhinge Hiya, K. Villingili
- 3) Amaan Hiya, K. Villingili
- 4) Family and Children's Service Centres

Children taken into state care in the Maldives are provided with shelter at the Children's Homes Kudakudhinge Hiya and Amaan Hiya in Villingili, and Fiyavathi in Hulhumale. The Ministry of Gender, Family, and Social Services oversees the management of children's shelters. These institutions aim to provide a safe, secure, and enabling environment for vulnerable children who have been subjected to various forms of neglect and abuse and have no other means of primary care.

The first residential care facility for children, Kudakudhinge Hiya, was opened in May 2006, and Amaan Hiya was established adjacent to the shelter to accommodate more children. The government established a third facility, Fiyavathi, in February 2016, due to an increase in the number of children taken into state care. The shelters now specialise in housing children of different age groups. As of August 2017, Kudakudhinge Hiya and Amaan Hiya accommodate 66 children aged 13-18 years, and Fiyavathi accommodates 100 children aged 13 or younger.

2.6.2 Family and Child Protection Department - Maldives Police Services

The Maldives Police Service has taken proactive measures when it comes to child abuse cases, introducing changes to its infrastructure in a bid to combat this issue. An entire division of the Maldives Police Service was tasked with investigating the unwarranted violence in the capital, Male. Social issues faced on each island led to the establishment of sub-branches. This enabled local response capabilities to emerge. The Maldives Police Service continued the transition of the Family and Child Protection Department into a department (wing) solely dedicated to such issues, which it began in 2020. As of now, the Family and Child Protection Wing investigates crimes committed against children by adults and those committed by children. It deals with domestic violence and gender-based violence, investigates cases of abuse and neglect of the

elderly by their caretaker, and forwards related matters to the Prosecutor General's Office to take legal action.

Moreover, this new wing oversees the coordination and cooperation of various departments involved in child protection investigations. Ern actively tracks and assesses the efforts and programs undertaken in cooperation with the government and local and international organisations. Such jurisdictional vigilance is crucial to recognise that properly dealing with and preventing child abuse is a multi-collaborative matter. Establishing the Family and Child Protection Wing marks a critical step for the Maldives Police Service. It also demonstrates its commitment to enhancing services for vulnerable populations and providing a more targeted and structured approach to protecting children and addressing related societal issues in the Maldives. The need for such solutions is not a trivialization of child abuse. Instead, it is an institutional recognition of the need for political action when it comes to violence and exploitation of children.

2.6.3 Children's Rights Commission

On February 21, 2020, President Ibrahim Mohamed Solih established the "Presidential Commission to Inquire into Child Rights Violations". According to a statement from the President's Office, the Commission was established under Presidential Decree 1/2020 and Article 115 of the Constitution. It was primarily a means to promote systemic measures to address historical injustices while safeguarding children's rights across the Maldives. This was a big step in creating more awareness and a more structured or coordinated effort to address child welfare issues and violations of the rights of children in the country.

The Commission must thoroughly investigate and assess all pending cases under the respective state parties and institutions involved in child protection. These include, but are not limited to, cases of violence, neglect, abuse, exploitation, and cruelty to children. It functions for understanding and analysing the causes of child abuse, particularly reasons, common sites of abuse, profiles of perpetrators (age, economic status, etc.), the crime rates, whether they are potential victims of violence, and the recent status of victims. The core principle of the Commission is to determine how state institutions are held accountable for their responsibility in protecting children.

Moreover, the Commission's establishment shall help concerned authorities to act appropriately against child abuse. This includes reviewing active cases and recommending corrective actions to address systemic deficiencies. The Commission is determined to take measures to protect children. It is also responsible for collecting and analysing information on child rights violations and for reporting them to the relevant authorities. It also aims to achieve better legal outcomes for victims by pursuing the conviction of offenders.

2.6.4 Children's Ombudspersons Office

On July 23, 2020, President Ibrahim Mohamed Solih was appointed the First Child Rights Ombudsperson of the Maldives. The appointment of a child rights ombudsperson was a crucial component of implementing the amended Child Rights Protection Act, which came into effect on 20 February 2020. The Ombudsperson is tasked with determining the extent to which institutions adhere to the Child Rights Protection Act and the Convention on the Rights of the Child. It is enforcing the implementation of these acts, and monitoring and evaluating the institutions and personnel involved in protecting children's rights.

Another important aspect of the Ombudsperson's duties is the authority to regulate information communicated to the public, thereby protecting the child's privacy and security. This long-awaited appointment of the Child Rights Ombudsperson comes amidst a renewed surge of reported child abuse cases in the country. Public rage continues to soar over the government's inadequate record of arresting and convicting perpetrators of sexual offences despite several promises to support the rights of children and women.

The responsibilities of the Children's Ombudsperson are taken from a translation done by the Family Legal Clinic of the Child Rights Act:

- 1) Identify the extent to which state institutions adhere to this Act and insist on doing all things necessary to enforce this Act.
- 2) Identifying the extent to which State institutions adhere to the Convention on the Rights of the Child and doing all things necessary to ensure that the Convention is adhered to.

- 3) Monitor and evaluate the authorities and employees involved in the protection of the rights of children in the Maldives, which is under the Protection of the Rights of Children Act Number 19/2019.
- 4) Investigate and review the actions of authorities and employees involved in protecting children's rights in the Maldives under the Protection of the Rights of Children Act Number 19/2019.

Children's Ombudsperson

ADVOCACY & AWARENESS	COMPLIANCE & ENFORCEMENT	COMPLAINTS & INVESTIGATIONS	MONITORING & EVALUATION	CORPORATE SERVICES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lobbying - Government Relations -Media Relations • Information & Education - Communications - Publications - Compliance Promotion 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Systems & Procedure Review - Institutional Review & Assessment •Capacity Assessment - Program Review - Compliance Audits -Spot Audits - Standardisation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Complaints Handlrg - Investigations • Corrective AcDOs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 'Impact Assessment - Performance Review & Assessment • Monitor ing of Wtow upA Corrective Actions - Research - Data Collection & Analysis 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ombudspersons Bureau - Operations Management - Human Resources - Budget & Finance • IT & LogsbcS • Procurement • Housekeeping & Maintenance

Figure 2.1 Children's Ombudspersons Office

Source: Department of Children's Ombudsperson's Office (2021)

2.6.5 Advocating the Rights of Children (ARC)

Advocating the Rights of Children (ARC) is a non-governmental, non-partisan, non-profit organisation registered in the Maldives since December 2009. Its mission is to protect and promote the rights and well-being of children in the Maldives. ARC's mission is to be the voice of children in the country, advocating for their health, safety, education, and well-being. ARC's main work areas include working closely with children's shelters, advocacy, and raising awareness of children's rights through national and international outreach. The main goals of ARC are to:

- 1) Promote the well-being and development of children
- 2) Advocacy to strengthen the existing child protection system
- 3) Raising awareness of children's rights and well-being
- 4) Providing support to children's shelters
- 5) Capacity-building training for the care workers

2.7 Challenges Addressing CSA in Developing Countries

Confronting CSA in developing nations poses distinct challenges due to socio-cultural, economic, and structural factors. In numerous nations, entrenched societal norms, including gender inequity, insufficient legal protections, and low knowledge of child sexual abuse, frequently obstruct effective prevention and response strategies. Furthermore, inadequate legal frameworks, limited resources for victim assistance, and a deficiency of skilled personnel intensify the issue. The shame associated with CSA, along with the fear of retaliation or scepticism from authorities, further deters victims and their families from reporting the abuse. These problems require multiple, culturally attuned strategies to create safer environments for children and to enhance understanding of CSA.

In the article "An Uphill Battle: A Systematic Literature Review on The Challenges of Addressing Child Sexual Abuse in The Developing Countries," Adam et al. (2024) identify multiple factors contributing to CSA and examine the obstacles to effective prevention, intervention, and support systems. The article emphasises that climate-smart agriculture in developing countries is a complex issue that requires a comprehensive, collaborative approach, encompassing legal, cultural, institutional, and technological solutions. Adam et al. (2024) propose a comprehensive approach that

encompasses legal reforms, public education, and enhanced support services for survivors. This review offers critical insights for policymakers, practitioners, and researchers addressing child sexual abuse in developing regions, emphasising the necessity for systemic change to safeguard children.

2.7.1 Taboo and Social Stigma

Many nations struggle to treat CSA due to taboos and shame (Kamis & Copeland, 2024; Ibrahim, 2018). In Indonesia, sex is considered sensitive and taboo, preventing victims from reporting abuse (Wismayanti et al., 2019). Child sexual abuse victims and their families often keep quiet for fear of stigma and until maturity, if they disclose at all. They fear upsetting their families and communities, so they do not tell. Danaeifar (2022) stresses that cultural and social concerns hinder sexually abused children in Iran. These hurdles stem from societal views on child sexual abuse, which need concealment to avoid scandal and social exclusion.

Families often avoid legal action or reporting abuse due to stigma, and children may fear more abuse or intimidation from the offender. In addition, families' lack of participation in the social work process exacerbates the situation, as they often seek to protect their reputation or avoid shame. According to Abdul Ghani et al. (2018), child sexual abuse, including premarital sex, incest, and statutory rape, is taboo in Malaysia. CSA victims' emotional and psychological distress is exacerbated by secrecy and shame, which hinders open discourse and complicates solutions. These findings show that in many countries, social stigma and cultural taboos around child sexual abuse affect reporting, treatment, and prevention, making intervention difficult.

2.7.2 Poverty and Economic Vulnerability

The research underscores the considerable influence of poverty and socio-economic vulnerability on the incidence of CSA. O'Leary et al. (2019) assert that poverty is intricately associated with substandard child welfare, encompassing insufficient healthcare, restricted educational prospects, and an elevated risk of trafficking. Low-income families and parents with minimal education are especially susceptible, as they frequently lack resources and access to information regarding CSA

prevention and intervention. Hence, heightens the risk of their children experiencing abuse.

This study underscores that children from dysfunctional families and those in impoverished conditions face an increased risk of encountering violence. Migrant families, frequently originating from low-income backgrounds with restricted formal schooling, are especially susceptible. Their limited employment prospects and inadequate home conditions subject them to heightened hazards, including imprisonment and health issues. The relationship between migration and CSA highlights how poverty-induced mobility might increase the likelihood of abuse. Economic adversity, urban migration, educational deficiency, and familial instability are all characteristics that increase susceptibility to child sexual abuse, as children in these situations are more prone to experiencing sexual exploitation and other forms of violence.

2.7.3 Weaknesses of the Legal System

The review uncovers discrepancies in CSA legislation among many nations, including Indonesia, Pakistan, Malaysia, South West Nigeria, Vietnam, and Iran. These nations are recognised for having inadequate legislative frameworks on CSA, underscoring the need for stronger enforcement and better implementation of existing laws. Research conducted by David et al. (2018), Abdul Ghani et al. (2018), Thuong et al. (2019), Ali (2018), and Danaeifar et al. (2022) underscores the necessity of implementing public health education, advocacy, and sexual abuse prevention initiatives within educational institutions to mitigate the adverse health consequences of CSA. This study emphasises the need to develop social work services and to reinforce child protection legislation. Moreover, increasing awareness among parents and children regarding the dangers of child sexual abuse and promoting the reporting of events can facilitate victims' access to essential support, such as counselling, while simultaneously serving as a deterrent to prospective abusers.

2.7.4 Lack of Knowledge about CSA

Child sexual abuse awareness is a topic of several studies. According to Cappa and Petrowski (2020), public awareness of CSA has influenced changes in laws, practices, and policies. This change has significantly impacted global research and created new fields, particularly in institutional child sexual abuse. Khoori et al. (2020) examined whether Gorgan moms can teach young girls about safety. This study found that mothers may teach their daughters about personal safety, suggesting that parents or caregivers, rather than schools, should be educated. This strategy highlights the shortcomings of focused CSA prevention and intervention while emphasising the child's family setting. Further studies are needed to improve child sexual assault responses and assess school policies and curricula.

Most interventions in developing nations have targeted preschool- and primary-school-aged children, primarily in educational settings (Russell et al., 2020). This study highlights the importance of examining government-initiated or community-wide preventive measures, as well as the scarcity of population-level interventions beyond educational institutions. These efforts aim to reduce CSA and victimisation by improving knowledge and skills. The lack of comprehensive interventions raises questions about their effectiveness.

2.7.5 Institutional and structural challenges

Administrative and structural issues at child services agencies limit the care of CSA victims. According to two articles, welfare organisations face constraints in worker qualifications, training, and resources. Staff shortages, a lack of expertise and training, poor infrastructure, and logistical constraints lead to unprofessional services and mistrust of social workers among victims, according to Muridzo et al. (2018). The mismatch between employees' education and responsibilities makes treatments ineffective and diverts resources from CSA victims. Lack of public understanding about CSA victim social services and emergency support is another issue. Although the system has improved, poor media coverage has left many uninformed of these resources, depriving the needy of aid. Multi-institutional services are further hampered by insufficient coordination and communication between organisations, leading to miscommunication, ineffective referrals, and inadequate support for CSA victims.

Pakistan lacks a strong child protection system, qualified professionals, and an official data foundation for recording CSA cases, complicating the matter. Ali (2018) urges Pakistan to amend its National Education Policy to include teacher sexual misconduct as a form of professional misconduct and to connect national legislation with the UNCRC principles to protect children in schools. Without addressing these administrative, structural, and legislative shortcomings, organisations cannot help CSA victims or prevent abuse.

This review emphasises the need for further research on CSA and highlights significant gaps in policy and legislation related to CSA. Closing these gaps requires improving data collection, policymaking, service delivery, and legal consistency to ensure effective implementation of these measures. Effective CSA interventions should target children, families, communities, and nations, with support from organisations and stakeholders. Institutions should support child and parent empowerment and community reintegration post-CSA. To improve results, legislation should be reviewed, and deterrent penalties strengthened.

2.8 Challenges in Dealing with Child Sexual Abuse (CSA) in the Maldives

2.8.1 Funding

Although investigators work hard to collect and document evidence of child abuse, their work is often ineffective, mainly because of the authorities. These include both governmental and non-governmental organisations, which fail to enforce child protection laws. Although all entities in prevention and recommendations have been made to the government for positive inclusion of those recommendations, Wright (2017) indicated a lack of support for the necessary government action. Additionally, funding organisations often deny financial assistance requests, compounding the problem.

Barnert et al. (2016) state that when there is sufficient funding to "enact... programs targeted at an advancement, that laws go into effect," with the protection of children at stake. Consistent with this, Russell, Higgins, and Posso (2020) highlight the importance of addressing the needs of victims and the prevention of child abuse in a public health framework. Russell, Higgins, and Posso (2020) also emphasise the need for adequate funding for such an approach. That is already an issue in developed nations, where researchers indicate that few governments can confirm that their budgets

include the funds necessary to support organisations seeking to protect children (Doek, Krappmann, & Lee, 2020).

Consequently, the Maldives-based children protection NGOs are primarily underfunded organisations. Because of this, these NGOs are often assumed to be unable to offer preemptive programs, provide limited aid to victims, and employ innovative intervention approaches. As a result, the main counterpart in the arena of children's protection has no measurable impact, leaving children in neighbouring areas even more vulnerable and preventing well-intentioned individuals from securing children's safety. In conclusion, this funding gap would be a critical issue in providing support for child victims and securing the advancement of child protection.

2.8.2 Community

Researchers identified insufficient community awareness of CSA prevention as another significant barrier. According to Todahl et al. (2019), community members did not know what they could do at the community level to prevent child abuse and neglect, and many community members felt that they did not know the personal steps they could take to make a significant dent in child abuse and neglect. This is due to a lack of knowledge and education about CSA, which should be addressed in schools and community settings (Mathews, 2017). It is indeed difficult to perform these acts, especially in Maldivian society. This is because even though child abuse cases are massively found in the region, the community is very rich in ignorance when it comes to how they can solve these problems, which is very serious.

In line with this idea, Fortson et al. (2018) argue that changing social norms that accept or allow indifference to violence is very important to the prevention of child abuse. They explain that a culture's awareness, beliefs, and expectations are crucial for preventing social abuse. The cultural underpinnings of abuse must be addressed to create a safer environment for children. Brown and Saied-Tessier (2015) state that "full community and governmental support" is needed for the prevention of sexual abuse in children.

It will take the collaboration of parents, journalists, teachers, social workers, doctors, family members, and friends to make this happen. Every stakeholder needs to be aware of the scope of CSA and, just as importantly, know how to work together to prevent it. In the Maldives, discussions in the community about cases of abuse tend to

last for a week, but societal focus on abuse cases tends to wear off after a few months. Lots of child abuse cases remain open for several years because of this short attention span, leading to ongoing violence and neglect of vulnerable children.

2.8.3 Communication Barriers and Medical Issues

One of the major obstacles that has had a severe negative impact on the proper functioning of organisations engaged in child abuse prevention efforts is the barrier of communication. It is recommended that healthcare professionals, including doctors and nurses, establish effective communication and reporting protocols to ensure timely notification of appropriate authorities regarding cases of child sexual abuse. As Line, Grant, and Hutton (2019) point out, this is a problem because information transfer was one-way, with pediatric nurses often the last to be informed about a decision. This is a call to action for healthcare professionals to adapt their communication to be more inclusive. Furthermore, the lack of systematic teamwork and effective communication among all parties involved in the child protection process exacerbates the situation. Nurses who conduct examinations on victims are often unaware of what happens to the case once they complete the initial reporting process (Line, Grant, & Hutton, 2019).

Widespread challenges can be effectively addressed by cultivating an integrated approach among all stakeholders in the child protection sector. Researchers contend that measurable, valid assessment methods are needed to inform and evaluate primary care, public health care, acute care, and other community-based interventions aimed at mitigating the effects of adverse childhood experiences (Bethel et al., 2017). Lalayants and Epstein (2005) highlighted that many agencies that prevent and respond to CSA often do not coordinate their processes for discussing cases, as described in their Child Advocacy Centre (CAC) Model. However, this failure to collaborate results in critical data points on cases being lost, hampering efforts to bring perpetrators to justice (Herbert & Bromfield, 2021).

Thus, professionals must work together to overcome communication hurdles when handling cases of CSA, one of the main concerns organisations face in protecting children. This model requires more than strong communication modalities. It also requires sharing information among workers from healthcare, law enforcement, and social services who collaborate. Establishing these links will be crucial to ensure that

child abuse cases are identified, investigated, and resolved in a timely and effective manner. Thus, supporting the overall approach of child protection initiatives.

2.8.4 Lack of Parental Care and How the Child Becomes a Victim

Despite increasing awareness about child abuse, many perpetrators intentionally erode children's confidence in coming forward with such abuse. This is primarily because most abusers are members of the family or people the family has allowed into the family circle. As Reitsema and Grietens (2020) document, this emotional bond makes it extremely difficult for children to talk about the abuse. Above all, adequate care is essential for safety, and parents are the primary caregivers responsible for ensuring their children's safety. However, there are many children whose parents are not supportive, especially when their parents are involved in substance abuse. These situations lower the risk of sexual abuse in a child while also making it harder for a parent to be involved in preventive measures (Simon, Luetzow & Conte, 2020). This is particularly true in the Maldives, where the country faces a high number of orphaned children due to their parents' drug use.

Not only do parents who struggle with addiction undermine efforts to prevent sexual abuse, but they are also often the abusers, simply not psychologically fit to be caregivers. As observed by Newberger and Newberger (1981), child abuse has been explained as the direct product of parental psychopathology. This supports Hussain and Tajuddin's (2015) assertion that some predators prey on children who lack parental attention. Hence, parental neglect is a significant risk factor for children. Meinck et al. (2015) also reported that a negative parent-child relationship is a significant risk factor for sexual abuse victimisation; specifically, weak mother-daughter relationships significantly increase the risk of child sexual abuse.

Scoglio et al. (2019) also stressed the importance of parental care for children who are subjected to abuse, and that parental support is important for organisations addressing the issue of child abuse. Parents who actively engage with their children may help reduce the likelihood that their children will be victimised again. However, sadly, very few children have the parental support needed to thrive due to substance abuse or a lack of knowledge about how to help their children. Daro et al. (2002) stressed the need for parental support and awareness and proposed a unified government and non-governmental organisation framework for combating child abuse.

They called for more research to determine what approaches work to prevent child abuse, emphasising the need to consider parental and child responses in that prevention context.

Moreover, researchers have highlighted the importance of effective child abuse prevention programs. It becomes the foundation on which parents and children know how they can respond to it, as well as what support is needed for the parents to act against child abuse. Further research is necessary to develop effective programs for children and their parents (Walsh et al., 2015). In favour of this idea, Scott, Lonne, and Higgins (2016) stated that designing programs that provide parents with tools to prevent sexual abuse was crucial. Above all, they called for offering help to drug-using parents so they could work on family issues and avoid further violence and maltreatment of their children.

CSA is prevalent worldwide, and many CSA cases remain unreported. Instead, this silence produces far-reaching physical, social, and mental health impacts for victims, who frequently suffer alone, feeling ashamed and stigmatised by what happened to them. Although there are international treaties and country-specific laws intended to protect children and punish offenders, CSA continues and can even lead to the death of victims. Ebuenyi, Uzoechi, and Dariah (2018) explained the ramifications of silence about CSA using a study in Yenagoa, Nigeria, with two cases of children aged seven and eight reported to suffer abuse and treated in a teaching hospital in Yenagoa. In these cases, the offenders were acquaintances of the victim's parents, who not only did not report the crimes to law enforcement but also stopped having medical follow-ups for their children.

Likewise, a case featured a 17-year-old girl who lost her mother at the age of only 14 and had to live with her father. During this time, she was continually raped by her father for two years. She eventually became pregnant and had to have an illegal termination of her pregnancy at seven weeks (Oseni, Lawan, & Oyedeji, 2016). There are many cases of abuse in the Maldives. The offenders are often fathers, grandfathers, brothers, or stepfathers, and the abuse takes place on islands. In particular, these cases are often overlooked. It shows a common trend in which parents and families decide to keep quiet instead of asking abusers to answer for their behaviour or inform the authorities about incidents.

This complete silence further entrenches the cycle of abuse instead of making a dent in it, which shows the need for action very badly. In preventing and eliminating

the scourge of CSA, including its pernicious effects, laws and regulations formulated to protect children are expected to be implemented effectively, both locally and internationally. This unwillingness to challenge perpetrators of child sexual abuse, coupled with fear of reporting such offences to the police, highlights the need for increased community and environmental awareness, education, and support for victims and their families. It is only through such collaborative interventions that we can create a society that prioritises the safety of children and holds abusers accountable for their actions.

2.8.5 Role of Educators

Schools are considered one of the most important environments for child abuse prevention, as "educators play an essential role in protecting children from abuse and neglect" (Underwood, 2016). Educators can be uniquely placed to recognise children who are abused or neglected, as a significant proportion of their time is spent in school. Now, as those responsible for students' academic care, educators are uniquely positioned to collaborate with relevant agencies to establish an effective support system for these students.

Although educators in the Maldives can report cases of abuse, the country has little focus on the implementation of programs that can help to educate students about child abuse. As a result, kids are not taught to face or deal with them. A more accurate representation of child abuse will provide a better understanding of associations with disease outcomes and risk factors. Child abuse is associated with poorer mental health outcomes, even in a population with a history of common types of child abuse (Tobias et al., 2016). The absence of preventive education in schools can ultimately hinder the mental and emotional health of children.

2.9 Intervention Mechanisms for CSA in Asia

CSA remains a significant concern throughout Asia, necessitating the development of thorough intervention strategies to address its incidence and consequences. Countries in the region have adopted a range of strategies, including legislative reforms, public awareness initiatives, school education programs, and technological interventions. Notwithstanding these initiatives, obstacles, including cultural stigma, insufficient resources, inadequate legal enforcement, and poor

interagency cooperation, impede the efficacy of programs. Enhancing preventive measures, empowering communities, and promoting collaboration among governments, non-governmental organisations, and other stakeholders are crucial to establishing a safer environment for children and reducing the incidence of CSA in Asia.

The article "The only way out is through a systematic literature review of the intervention mechanisms for child sexual abuse in Asia" by Adam et al. (2024) stated that the global public health and human rights crisis of CSA continues due to several reasons. Weak legal systems, cultural stigmas, and fragmented intervention mechanisms contribute to the prevalence of CSA in Asia. This systematic literature analysis examines legal frameworks, community-based programs, and victim support systems in Asian countries. Maldives, India, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, and the Philippines are prioritised. Drawing on case studies and the literature, the document highlights successes and failures in CSA mitigation and offers policy recommendations for governments, NGOs, and local communities. This assessment highlights the importance of developing comprehensive, culturally responsive CSA solutions that engage all societal sectors. The authors discussed significant findings from a thorough analysis of Asian CSA intervention methodologies, such as legal frameworks, community-based efforts, school-based initiatives, and multi-agency collaboration. Nevertheless, they also discussed the challenges in implementing CSA interventions.

2.9.1 Community-based Interventions

Community-based programs are essential for preventing CSA and supporting victims throughout Asia. These projects utilise local cultural norms, include leaders, and advocate for education to mitigate stigma and enhance awareness. The Childline India Foundation provides practical assistance to victims of child sexual abuse in metropolitan regions. However, obstacles remain in rural areas. In Nepal, grassroots child protection committees encounter patriarchal opposition despite their efforts to raise awareness. In the Maldives, Family and Children Service Centres (FCSC) deliver essential care, yet deficiencies in training and engagement impede progress (Mohamed et al., 2020). Engagements with religious leaders can help alleviate stigma. Stoltenborgh et al. (2011) emphasise data-driven initiatives to prevent CSA globally, whereas Nguyen et al. (2024) underscore the importance of collaboration among families,

schools, and organisations. Moreover, community-based initiatives address cyberbullying and promote constructive parenting methodologies (Kamaruddin et al., 2023; Robinson et al., 2023). These activities are crucial in areas with deficient formal systems, as they promote education, dialogue, and collaboration to improve child safety and reduce stigma (Russell et al., 2020).

2.9.2 School-based Interventions

School-based interventions in Asia are vital to preventing and managing child sexual abuse. Thailand's national curriculum on physical autonomy and South Korea's Good Touch, Bad Touch (Kim & Kim, 2020) raise children's awareness and ability to report abuse. Cultural stigmas and parental reluctance may prevent reporting. Expanding age-appropriate, interactive CSA education is crucial in India, Nepal, and the Philippines (Ferragut et al., 2023). Urban schools often have more resources, but rural schools frequently struggle with untrained teachers and cultural barriers. Women-only sessions and the involvement of religious leaders are needed in Bangladesh and Pakistan (Khan & Hussain, 2020). The Maldives' pilot programs teach kids about personal safety and abuse reporting, but teachers' hesitance hinders progress. Nguyen et al. (2024) and Lu et al. (2022) recommend interactive workshops, multimedia tools, and parental engagement to improve CSA education.

Cyberbullying prevention programs and peer-led initiatives enhance student safety and resilience (Kamaruddin et al., 2023). School engagement and knowledge of safety are particularly crucial in disadvantaged areas (Russell et al., 2020). Standardising and culturally adapting these interventions across Asia is essential for their long-term success.

2.9.3 Legal Frameworks and Government Interventions

Asian countries have strengthened their child protection laws, but enforcement remains problematic. Protracted proceedings and corruption plague the Philippines' Special Protection Act (RA 7610), requiring judicial reforms (Reyes, 2016). The 2019 Japanese Child Abuse Prevention Act boosted reporting but did not fully protect reporters (Nakajima & Saito, 2020). The POCSO Act in India has increased child sexual abuse reporting, but long trials and poor victim support have lowered conviction rates.

Due to delays and a lack of child-friendly courts, the Maldives' Sexual Offences Act (2014) requires faster court processes and improved care for victims (Rashid et al., 2019; Ali & Ahmed, 2022).

Cyberbullying necessitates robust laws, comprehensive education, and practical government-community cooperation (Kamaruddin et al., 2023). Parental education, nonviolent discipline, and interagency coordination are crucial to achieving comprehensive reforms (Robinson et al., 2023; Russell, 2020). The prevention of child sexual abuse, provision of support to victims, and enforcement of responsibility require strong legal frameworks and government action.

2.9.4 Therapeutic and Counselling Interventions

Asia has less therapy research for CSA survivors than other locations. Lack of access, stigma, and a shortage of trained personnel are studied. Kumar et al. (2021) stressed the benefits of group therapy for Indian women but noted that stigma prevents participation, advocating for mental health support awareness campaigns. Remote islands in the Maldives have few therapeutic choices. While urban trauma care has improved, Fathimath and Zubair (2021) found that rural areas lack skilled experts and that stigma prevents patients from seeking aid. Telemedicine and training for mental health practitioners are recommended. To address the psychological effects of CSA and improve survivors' recovery and long-term well-being, Nguyen et al. (2024) recommend trauma-informed treatment, accessible counselling, and experienced experts.

2.9.5 Digital and Technological Interventions

Asian governments are employing technology to raise awareness, report, and support child sexual abuse (CSA), especially in disadvantaged areas. Child Helpline 1412 and UNICEF Maldives utilise social media for reporting and education purposes. NCPCR and INHOPE have a Cyber Tipline, while Childline 1098, Bachpan Bachao Andolan, and Arpan use the internet for prevention and education. In collaboration with worldwide organisations, Nepal's Child Safe Net project encourages digital literacy, internet safety, and reporting. In the Philippines, CPC and SALI fight online child sexual exploitation, while IJM tracks offenders and monitors them. South Korea's

SafeHome App enables children to anonymously report CSA and receive support, thereby improving reporting and minimising stigma (Lee & Jeong, 2022).

WeChat is utilised by Chinese NGOs to disseminate CSA prevention information and offer virtual therapy in remote regions with inadequate safety infrastructure (Li et al., 2021). In regions without traditional support networks, smartphone apps and online platforms are used for discreet reporting, education, and counselling. Kamaruddin et al. (2023) emphasise the role of online platforms and apps in educating children on safe online behaviour, reporting, and intervention for cyberbullying. Digital techniques enhance online safety and reduce victimisation by emphasising the use of monitoring tools to warn parents and educators.

2.10 Challenges in Implementing CSA Interventions

CSA is widespread in Asia, exacerbated by various cultures, legal systems, and economies. Stigma, legal issues, inadequate inter-agency collaboration, and budgetary constraints hinder assistance. Cultural taboos inhibit victims from reporting abuse, and fragmented government, NGO, and international agency coordination lead to inconsistent victim support. Economic inequities worsen these issues, especially in resource-poor, low-income, and rural communities (Amin et al., 2024). New forms of CSA, such as online exploitation, require resource-intensive interventions because they rely on digital technologies. India, the Philippines, and China struggle to handle internet CSA, especially in rural areas. These difficulties require a comprehensive, context-sensitive approach that examines the region's socio-economic, legal, and cultural intricacies to establish coordinated and sustained child protection policies.

2.10.1 Cultural Taboos and Stigmatisation

Stigma, cultural taboos, and patriarchal beliefs hamper CSA interventions throughout Asia. Because victims fear social ostracism and retaliation, they commonly victim-blame, are quiet, and underreport. Amin et al. (2024) note that patriarchal norms in many Asian nations may normalise or diminish abuse, and cultural taboos inhibit sexual violence talks. Families fear community criticism and do not report sexual abuse in the Maldives (Maldives Ministry of Gender, Family, and Social Services, 2021). Cultural taboos about sexuality and family honour restrict Indian victims from reporting abuse (Ministry of Women and Child Development, 2020). Stigma and cultural norms

prevent reporting and public discourse, marginalising victims and keeping abusers unaccountable in rural and conservative communities. Cultural and social barriers exacerbate abuse cycles and limit regional action.

2.10.2 Insufficient Intersectoral Collaboration

Poor intersectoral collaboration among health, education, and law enforcement hinders Asian CSA initiatives. In many countries, groups operate independently, leading to delays, inconsistent support, and inadequate case management. The Maldives, India, Nepal, and China lack adequate coordination frameworks due to communication and resource constraints (UNICEF, 2020; Luan et al., 2023). Inter-agency collaboration frameworks exist in the Philippines and Bangladesh. However, implementation and communication are often lacking, particularly in rural regions (UNICEF Philippines, 2022; Backhaus et al., 2023). The lack of consistent methodologies and coordinated training programs hinders the effectiveness of regional CSA interventions.

2.10.3 Inadequate Legal Enforcement

Inadequate, obsolete, and inconsistent laws limit CSA interventions in Asia. Many nations lack comprehensive child protection laws, especially for online exploitation (Solehati et al., 2022). Delays, corruption, and poor training for law enforcement and judges contribute to mishandled cases and inadequate victim support. Enforcement delays and poor prosecution hinder the administration of justice in the Maldives (UNICEF, 2020). Police insensitivity and legal delays persist in India, notwithstanding the POCSO Act (Ministry of Women and Child Development, 2020). Enforcement is inconsistent in China and Nepal, especially in rural areas with few resources and awareness (Katz et al., 2021; Hommes, 2020). Corruption, resource constraints, and insufficient training weaken Philippine law (ECPAT Philippines, 2021). Institutional inefficiencies and ineffective enforcement undermine the legal safeguards of regional CSA victims.

2.10.4 Funding Intervention Programs

Insufficient financing and resources plague Asian CSA intervention projects. Many governments prioritise tourism, infrastructure, and poverty reduction over social welfare, underfunding CSA initiatives. The Maldives, India, Nepal, and China rely on foreign aid, as local funding mechanisms are often inefficient or inconsistent (UNICEF, 2020; Hommes, 2020; Luan et al., 2023). Donor dependency and political instability worsen financial restrictions in the Maldives and Nepal. India faces bureaucratic delays and inadequate coordination of grant distribution, whereas the Philippines has limited government resources and relies on international organisations (Ministry of Women and Child Development, 2020; ECPAT International, 2021). Poor financial prioritisation and cultural stigma hinder CSA interventions in national budgets across the region (Russell et al., 2020; Nguyen, 2024).

2.10.5 Economic Constraints

Economic constraints significantly hinder CSA intervention strategies in Asia, particularly in terms of inequalities both across and within countries. Nepal and the Maldives rely heavily on foreign aid, which makes child protection services unsustainable. Additionally, rural resource shortages exacerbate the challenges of providing these services (Amin et al., 2024). Due to budgetary and infrastructure constraints, the Maldives struggles to provide services to remote islands. Urban areas in India and China receive advanced CSA treatments, while rural areas are ignored and underfunded (Solehati et al., 2022). The Philippines has made progress against online CSA through international alliances, although rural areas continue to lag due to funding constraints. Economic differences impair law enforcement and social worker digital threat training, leaving economically disadvantaged children vulnerable. These limits illustrate the dispersed and inequitable nature of CSA efforts across the region.

2.10.6 Training Gaps

Asian educators, social workers, and law enforcement officers generally lack CSA awareness and response training. Continuous professional growth is essential yet underfunded and inconsistent. Insufficient inter-agency cooperation and budget constraints hinder CSA case manager training in the Maldives (UNICEF, 2020). Indian

and Nepalese rural residents lack access to standardised training programs, and cultural stigma discourages participation. Professional trauma-informed care training is lacking in Nepal (Hommes, 2020). In China's CSA training programs, rural professionals often have limited access to resources and training (Luan et al., 2023). Rural shortages of competent experts and overburdened child protection institutions in the Philippines limit training and interventions (UNICEF Philippines, 2022). Social stigma, low finances, and poor cross-sector coordination hinder trauma-informed and specialised training, reducing the effectiveness of CSA therapies across the region.

2.10.7 Inadequate Awareness Campaigns

Due to cultural taboos, government indifference, and limited rural outreach, CSA programs in Asia face challenges in raising awareness. Due to stigma, cultural beliefs, and inconsistent government commitment, the Maldives, India, China, and Nepal struggle to implement effective awareness campaigns. The Maldives' cultural taboos against sexual abuse isolate victims and leave them unaided. Indian families avoid reporting abuse and attending awareness programs due to shame and gender conventions. In rural China, family honour and cultural traditions prevent reporting (Wu & Wang, 2024). Underfunded NGOs in the Maldives lead awareness initiatives, while NGOs in India and China focus on metropolitan regions, leaving rural communities underserved.

Geographic and infrastructure issues hinder awareness campaigns. The dispersed islands in the Maldives make outreach to distant communities complex (UNICEF, 2020). Delhi and Shanghai benefit from more initiatives, whereas rural areas in India and China lack resources and education. Nepal's rural villages often have uneven campaigns due to financial and professional constraints. Digital hazards are another issue. The Philippines has improved online safety, but rural areas still lack access to it. India and China also lack awareness of online CSA hazards, especially in rural areas where children are more vulnerable due to low internet literacy (Wu & Wang, 2024). CSA prevention and intervention in Asia are hampered by low resources, stigma, and inconsistent awareness initiatives, leaving rural and marginalised communities vulnerable.

This study highlights the importance of adopting a comprehensive approach to addressing these challenges. This approach entails strengthening legal frameworks,

enhancing intersectoral collaboration, devoting resources to training and awareness, and promoting cultural shifts to assist victims. Overcoming these obstacles is crucial for successfully implementing effective CSA treatments across Asia. The report also presents future recommendations, examining the advantages of the recommended solutions and the limits that could affect their efficacy.

2.11 Past Studies and Gaps

The highlighted gaps across past studies, as summarised in Table 2.1, significantly affect the direction and depth of this study. In light of the significant gaps in the existing literature on CSA, it became evident that conducting this study was vital to understanding the measures, challenges, and effective approaches employed by the government and NGOs to address CSA in the Maldives. Prior to the study, the literature indicated a lack of standardization in reporting mechanisms and intervention protocols among governmental entities and NGOs. Significant discrepancies in inter-agency responses and data-sharing processes highlighted a fragmented approach to tackling CSA. Moreover, existing legislative frameworks, such as the Child Rights Act, were often unenforced or poorly applied, reflecting a gap in effective governance. The study aimed to thoroughly examine the specific measures currently employed in the Maldives to combat CSA (RO 1). By exploring initiatives from both governmental and NGO perspectives, it sought to identify successful strategies and pinpoint areas needing improvement. Understanding these measures was crucial for enhancing existing protocols and ensuring a unified approach to CSA prevention and intervention.

This study also revealed significant obstacles hindering both governmental and NGO efforts to respond effectively to CSA, including a lack of funding, inadequate training of personnel, and cultural taboos surrounding abuse. Public distrust in institutions further complicated the response to CSA, leading to underreporting and ineffective case handling. Fragmentation of services due to poor inter-sectoral collaboration exacerbated the issues, resulting in missed opportunities for timely intervention. This study explored the specific challenges (RO 2) these organizations faced, providing insights into systemic weaknesses that contributed to underreporting and inadequate victim protection. By identifying and analyzing these challenges, the study informed stakeholders of the necessary organizational reforms, resource allocations, and policy changes needed to strengthen the CSA response framework.

Additionally, the study highlighted that a lack of community involvement and awareness, insufficient trauma-informed care, and the absence of standardized educational programs for prevention often limited existing approaches to CSA in the Maldives. Previous research had not adequately addressed the potential for community-based interventions or strategies that engaged local leaders and communities in breaking the silence surrounding CSA. By examining effective approaches that the government and NGOs could adopt (RO 3), the study proposed actionable strategies to address the multifaceted nature of CSA. It provided valuable insights into collaborative initiatives involving government, NGOs, and the broader community, fostering an inclusive environment to prevent abuse, effectively support victims, and create sustainable change.

Table 2.1

Past Studies and Gaps

Theme	Author/Year	Key Findings	Gaps Identified
Cultural Attitudes & Stigma	Kamis & Copeland, (2024); Ibrahim (2018)	CSA linked to shame and "honour"; families deny abuse to protect social image.	Cultural taboos and denial hinder intervention.
Reporting & Legal Barriers	UNICEF & Ministry of Gender (2009)	15% of students reported sexual abuse; the justice process was burdensome (e.g., the need for four witnesses).	Legal requirements discourage victims from pursuing justice.
Gender Disparities in Victimhood	Walsh et al. (2025); UNICEF & Ministry of Gender (2009)	Girls more frequently report CSA; possible underreporting for boys.	Gender bias in identification and support systems.
Statistics & Institutional Response	Ministry of Gender (2021)	Reported CSA cases range from 282 to 353 annually; inter-agency discrepancies are noted.	Lack of standardised data-sharing and coordination.
Lack of Trust in Institutions	Transparency Maldives (2015)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 51% of citizens reported no confidence in the judiciary. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Public distrust in the justice system limits the reporting of crimes.

Pandemic-Related CSA	Mahkthoom (2020)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lockdowns increased CSA cases; victims were trapped with abusers at home or in guesthouses. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No emergency protocols for CSA during crises.
Victim Protection Failures	India Today (2020)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Victim re-victimised after being returned to an abusive environment; severe institutional neglect. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Inadequate follow-up, no protective custody rights.
Guesthouse Exploitation	ARC (2020)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Children are exploited in unregulated guesthouses and through private transportation. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Weak regulation and oversight of the hospitality and transport sectors.
Parental Negligence	ARC (2020); Maldives Police (2020)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Parents knowingly or unknowingly exposed children to abusers (e.g., sending a child to an unknown man in Male). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Parental awareness is often lacking, and they are frequently complicit or negligent.
Systemic Legal Weaknesses	ARC (2020)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Child Rights Act 2019 exists, but key sections are not properly enforced (e.g., Articles 122-126). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Weak implementation and enforcement of child protection legislation.
Transnational & Complex Abuse	India Today (2020)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Case in India: gender reassignment and forced sex work of a boy; the victim was later killed. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> CSA is intertwined with trafficking and systemic abuse; there is a severe failure of social systems.

Individual Level	Antonowicz (2010); Adam (2017)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children with disabilities and marginalised children are at a higher risk of CSA. Poor parental/peer relationships increase vulnerability. Abuse causes physical, emotional, and psychological harm. Abuse effects can last into adulthood. Childhood abuse increases the risk of becoming an abuser. Resilience requires systemic and family support. 	<p>Parental neglect of special needs children.</p> <p>Long-term abuse effects are challenging to identify.</p> <p>Lack of access to medical/emotional support.</p> <p>Need for multi-faceted trauma treatment.</p>
Family Level	Antonowicz (2010); Seema & Shalini (2020); Richter, Dawes & Higson-Smith (2007); Independent News (2013); Adam (2017)	<p>Young parents lack child-rearing knowledge.</p> <p>Poverty leads to child abuse and trafficking.</p> <p>Marital discord and domestic violence increase risk.</p> <p>Single-parent families have a higher CSA risk.</p>	<p>Anger management issues.</p> <p>Poverty-related exploitation.</p> <p>Crowded living conditions risk.</p> <p>Emotional neglect and alcohol abuse are prevalent.</p> <p>Procedural/legal failures for victim protection.</p>

School Level	Maldives Police Service, Ministry of Gender, Family, and Social Services (2021)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The high divorce rate in the Maldives affects children. • Abuse cases within families (stepfather case). • Educators can be perpetrators (e.g., Quran teachers). • Schools are supposed to be safe, but abuse occurs. • Medical exams confirm abuse cases. • Reporting and intervention by authorities are critical. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ineffective reporting structures. • Lack of training among staff. • Vulnerability in the school environment is not adequately addressed.
Community Level	Schein(2010)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Culture normalises or ignores abuse. • Shame and stigma prevent reporting. • Silence perpetuates abuse cycles. • Lack of community support. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cultural taboos inhibit discussion. • Fear of social repercussions. • Low community awareness and engagement.
National & International Level	Dehlmer (2009); Bandura(1977)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Media and technology expose children to harmful sexual content. • Observational learning can spread harmful behaviours. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Easy access to pornography. • Children are unaware of risks. • Inadequate monitoring/regulation. • Few media-related risk interventions.

Policies and Acts	<p>Maldives Government (1991, 2009); CRC, Department of Judicial Administration (2013)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rapid tech advances increase exploitation risks. • Media literacy and risk awareness are needed. • CRC ratified; child protection laws enacted. • CSA offences are clearly defined with penalties. • Confidentiality of victims. • Lower evidence standards for CSA. • Offender monitoring and compensation mechanisms. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enforcement challenges. • Victim protection issues. • Need ongoing law effectiveness review. • Procedural violations in CSA case handling.
Funding	<p>Wright (2017); Barnertetal. (2016); Russell et al. (2020); Doek et al. (2020)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Investigators' work hindered by lack of enforcement and government action. • NGOs are underfunded, limiting prevention programs and victim aid. • Funding is essential to enact laws and programs protecting children. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Government and NGOs lack consistent funding. • Financial assistance requests are often denied. • Underfunding leads to ineffective interventions and increased child vulnerability.

Community Awareness	Todahletal. (2019); Mathews (2017); Fortsonetal. (2018); Brown & Saied- Tessier(2015)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The public health approach requires adequate funding. • Communities lack knowledge of preventing CSA. • Social norms often tolerate violence. • Short societal attention span on abuse cases. • Collaborative community involvement is essential (parents, teachers, media, health workers). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Low community awareness and education. • Cultural tolerance of abuse. • Lack of sustained community engagement. • Ignorance about effective prevention roles.
Communication & Medical Issues	Line, Grant & Hutton (2019); Bethel etal. (2017); Lalayants & Epstein (2005); Herbert & Bromfield(2021)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Poor communication among healthcare, law enforcement, and social services. • Pediatric nurses are often the last informed. • Lack of coordinated case discussion. • Need shared data to improve justice outcomes. • Systematic teamwork is lacking. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fragmented communication flows. • Healthcare workers are uninformed of case outcomes. • Missing coordination results in lost data. • Lack of shared protocols and integrated teamwork.

Lack of Parental Care & Victimization	Reitsema & Grietens (2020); Simon, Luetzow & Conte (2020); Newberger & Newberger (1981); Hussain & Tajuddin (2015); Meinck et al. (2015); Scoglio et al. (2019); Daro et al. (2002); Walsh et al. (2015); Scott, Lonne & Higgins (2016); Ebuenyi et al. (2018); Oseni, Lawan & Oyedeji (2016)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Abusers are often family or close to family. • Parental addiction and neglect increase abuse risk. • Emotional bonds hinder victim disclosure. • Poor parental care worsens child vulnerability. • Many cases are unreported due to stigma and fear. • Victims suffer long-term trauma. • Lack of parental education/support. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parental neglect and addiction are prevalent. • Silence and stigma block reporting. • Inadequate support for victims. • Legal protection and enforcement are weak. • Need for better prevention programs involving parents.
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Role of Educators	Underwood (2016); Tobias et al. (2016)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Educators are critical in identifying and reporting abuse. • Schools lack child abuse education programs. • Absence of prevention education affects mental health outcomes. • Educators can collaborate with agencies for student support. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of CSA preventive education in schools. • Inadequate training for educators. • Weak reporting and support systems. • Mental health risks for students are not addressed.
General Challenges in Developing Countries	Adam et al. (2024)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CSA in developing countries is complicated by socio-cultural, economic, and structural factors. • Need for legal reforms, public education, and survivor support. • Calls for systemic, collaborative approaches including legal, cultural, institutional, and technological solutions. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Entrenched societal norms and gender inequity. • Inadequate legal protections. • Lack of skilled personnel. • Low victim reporting due to shame and fear. • Resource limitations.

Taboo and Social Stigma	Wismayanti et al (2019); Danaeifar (2022); Abdul Ghani et al. (2018)	<p>Sex and CSA taboo topics, leading to underreporting.</p> <p>Victims and families avoid disclosure due to fear of stigma, shame, and social exclusion.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Families may avoid legal action to protect their reputation. • Emotional distress worsened by secrecy and shame. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social stigma suppresses open discussion. • Families are unwilling to engage with social workers. • Victims fear retaliation or intimidation. • Culture enforces silence on CSA cases.
Poverty and Economic Vulnerability	O'Leary et al. (2019)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Poverty is linked with poor child welfare, healthcare deficits, limited education, and trafficking risk. • Low-income, low-education families have higher CSA risk. • Migrant and dysfunctional families are especially vulnerable. • Urban migration increases abuse risk. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Economic hardship limits access to prevention and support. • Migrant families are often in precarious living and working conditions. • Families lack education and resources about CSA.

Weaknesses of the Legal System	David et al. (2018); Abdul Ghani et al. (2018); Thuong et al. (2019); Ali (2018); Danaeifar et al. (2022)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Many developing countries have inadequate CSA legislation. • Poor enforcement and inconsistent application of laws. • Need for social work services development and legal strengthening. • Education on CSA dangers and reporting promotion is required. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Legislative gaps and weak enforcement. • Lack of integration between legislation and social services. • Insufficient awareness among parents and children. • Absence of deterrent penalties.
Lack of Knowledge about CSA	Cappa & Petrowski (2020); Khoori et al. (2020); Russell et al. (2020)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Public awareness has influenced policy and research. • Parental education is critical, sometimes more than schools. • Most interventions target young children in schools. • Few community-wide or population-level interventions. • Need to improve knowledge and skills broadly. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limited comprehensive CSA education beyond schools. • Parents and caregivers are often uneducated on CSA prevention. • Lack of wide-reaching preventive programs. • Gaps in school policies.

Institutional and Structural Challenges	Muridzo et al. (2018); Ali (2018)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Child welfare agencies face staff shortages, training gaps, and poor infrastructure. • Poor coordination among organisations leads to miscommunication. • The public is unaware of victim support services. • Weak child protection systems and data collection. • Legislative gaps compound problems. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Undertrained, understaffed child protection workforce. • Fragmented service delivery. • Lack of official CSA data and reporting systems. • Inadequate policy coherence. • Poor media coverage of CSA support services.
Community-based Interventions	Adam et al. (2024); Mohamed et al. (2020); Stoltenborgh et al. (2011); Nguyen et al. (2024); Kamaruddin et al. (2023); Robinson et al. (2023); Russell et al. (2020)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use local cultural norms and leaders to reduce stigma and raise awareness. • Childline India is effective in urban areas, but rural areas face challenges. • Patriarchal resistance in Nepal. • Maldives' Family and Children Service Centres face training/engagement issues. • Religious leaders can help reduce stigma. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of trained staff and engagement in some areas. • Patriarchal and cultural resistance. • Limited reach in rural areas. • Stigma persists despite efforts. • Formal systems are weak in some regions.

School-based Interventions	Kim & Kim (2020); Ferragut et al. (2023); Khan & Hussain (2020); Nguyen et al. (2024); Lu et al. (2022); Kamaruddin et al. (2023); Russell et al. (2020)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Emphasises collaboration across families, schools, and organisations. • Tackles cyberbullying and promotes positive parenting. • National curricula in Thailand and South Korea improve awareness. • Cultural stigma and parental reluctance impede reporting. • Rural schools lack resources and trained teachers. • Women-only and religious leader sessions needed in Bangladesh/Pakistan. • The Maldives is piloting personal safety programs, but teachers' hesitance is noted. • Cyberbullying prevention and peer-led initiatives are effective. • Urban-rural disparities in resources and engagement. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unequal resource distribution. • Cultural barriers to open discussion. • Teachers' reluctance limits program success. • Insufficient standardisation of programs. • Parental involvement is often weak.
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Legal Frameworks & Government Interventions	Reyes (2016); Nakajima & Saito (2020); Rashid et al. (2019); Ali & Ahmed (2022); Kamaruddin et al. (2023); Robinson et al. (2023); Russell (2020)	<p>Strengthened child protection laws exist, but enforcement is weak.</p> <p>Corruption and slow judicial processes in the Philippines.</p> <p>Reporting improved in Japan and India, but conviction and victim support are lacking.</p> <p>Maldives' courts slow, victim care insufficient.</p> <p>Cyberbullying legislation is still developing.</p> <p>Parental education and interagency coordination are needed.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Delays injudicial processes. • Corruption. • Lack of child-friendly courts. • Poor victim support systems. • Weak enforcement mechanisms. • Cyberbullying laws need development.
Therapeutic and Counselling Interventions	Kumar et al. (2021); Fathimath & Zubair (2021); Nguyen et al. (2024)	<p>Group therapy benefits Indian survivors.</p> <p>Stigma and lack of trained personnel limit access.</p> <p>The rural Maldives has few therapeutic options.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stigma prevents survivors from seeking help. • Lack of mental health professionals in rural areas. • Limited awareness of therapy benefits. • Inadequate mental health infrastructure.

Digital and Technological Interventions	Lee & Jeong (2022); Li et al. (2021); Kamaruddin et al. (2023)	<p>Urban trauma care improved, but rural gaps persist.</p> <p>Telemedicine is suggested to bridge access gaps.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Trauma-informed, accessible counselling recommended. • Use of helplines, apps, and social media to report and educate. • Cyber Tipline and SafeHome app improve reporting and reduce stigma. <p>WeChat supports prevention and virtual therapy in remote China.</p> <p>Digital literacy promoted in Nepal.</p> <p>Online platforms used for discreet reporting and counselling.</p> <p>Emphasis on monitoring tools for online safety.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The digital divide limits access in remote and poor areas. • Need for culturally sensitive and child-friendly tech solutions. • Privacy and safety concerns. • Limited awareness of digital tools.
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Cultural Taboos and Stigmatisation	Amin et al. (2024); Maldives Ministry of Gender, Family, and Social Services (2021); Ministry of Women and Child Development (2020)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Patriarchal norms normalise or downplay abuse. • Victims fear social ostracism and retaliation. • Families fear community criticism and avoid reporting. • Silence perpetuates abuse cycles. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cultural taboos inhibit discussions on sexual violence. • Victim-blaming and underreporting. • Marginalisation of victims. • Limited public discourse and accountability.
Insufficient Intersectoral Collaboration	UNICEF (2020); Luan et al. (2023); UNICEF Philippines (2022); Backhaus et al. (2023)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fragmented operation of health, education, and law enforcement sectors. • Poor communication and coordination across agencies. • Existing frameworks are weakly implemented, especially in rural areas. • Inconsistent training methodologies. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The independent functioning of agencies delays case management. • Lack of coordinated training and protocols. • Resource limitations hamper collaboration. • Rural areas are underserved.
Inadequate Legal Enforcement	Solehati et al. (2022); UNICEF (2020); Ministry of Women and Child Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Many countries lack comprehensive child protection laws. • Delays, corruption, and poor law enforcement impede justice. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Obsolete laws. • Corruption and poor judicial training. • Lack of child-friendly courts. • Inconsistent law enforcement in rural areas.

	(2020); Katz et al. (2021); Hommes (2020); ECPAT Philippines (2021)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Police insensitivity and inadequate victim support are typical. • Online exploitation laws are weak or absent. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Insufficient protection for online CSA victims,
Funding Intervention Programs	UNICEF (2020); Hommes (2020); Luan et al. (2023); Ministry of Women and Child Development (2020); ECPAT International (2021); Russell et al. (2020); Nguyen (2024)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CSA programs are underfunded relative to other priorities. • Heavy dependence on foreign aid in the Maldives, India, Nepal, and China. • Political instability and bureaucratic delays exacerbate funding issues. • Limited government budget allocation. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Insufficient local funding mechanisms, • Donor dependency risks sustainability. • Political and bureaucratic delays. • Cultural stigma lowers budget prioritisation.
Economic Constraints	Amin et al. (2024); Solehati et al. (2022)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Economic disparities create unequal access to CSA services. • Rural and island communities face service delivery challenges. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Resource shortages in rural and remote areas, • Reliance on foreign aid. • Infrastructure and budget constraints, • Inequitable service distribution.

Training Gaps	UNICEF (2020); Hommes (2020); Luan et al. (2023); UNICEF Philippines (2022)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Urban centres are better resourced than rural areas. • Economic inequalities limit law enforcement and training. • Lack of continuous, standardised CSA training for educators, social workers, and law enforcement. • Rural areas are especially underserved. • Cultural stigma discourages training participation. • Trauma-informed care training is limited. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Insufficient funding for training. • Poor cross-sector coordination. • Lack of trained experts in rural areas. • Overburdened child protection staff.
Inadequate Awareness Campaigns	UNICEF (2020); Wu & Wang (2024)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cultural taboos and stigma limit public awareness. • Campaigns underserve rural areas. • Geographic challenges hamper outreach. • Digital hazards awareness is low in rural communities. • Urban-rural awareness gap. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limited government commitment. • Geographic and infrastructural barriers. • Underfunded NGOs. • Digital literacy and access disparities. • Cultural resistance to messaging.

2.12 Theory Related to Child Sexual Abuse (CSA)

Three important theories that emerged as relevant to this study are Institutional Theory, Ecological Systems Theory, and Social Learning Theory.

2.12.1 Institutional Theory

Institutional theory posits that institutions shape a society's behaviours, practices, and policies. Institutions, encompassing formal structures such as laws and regulations, as well as informal norms and cultural beliefs, influence organisations' decisions. In addressing CSA, the role of institutions is particularly significant, as they provide the framework within which government and NGOs implement measures to prevent and respond. This study reveals that effective management of CSA requires robust institutional mechanisms that foster accountability and governance. The government and NGOs can effectively address CSA and enhance their operational capacities by creating formal structures, such as guidelines and regulations. However, identified gaps in existing laws, policies, and institutional support systems illuminate the need for ongoing development and reform. Weak or poorly enforced legislation can hinder progress, making it essential to strengthen institutional frameworks to ensure policy compliance and better outcomes in CSA prevention and intervention efforts.

This study examines the measures, challenges, and effective approaches employed by the Maldivian government and NGOs to address CSA. Applying institutional theory is directly relevant to the research questions posed in this study. By examining the institutional structures and policies implemented by the Maldives government and NGOs to address CSA (RQ 1), this study aligns with the fundamental premise of institutional theory. Understanding the roles of various stakeholders will provide insights into how effectively these organisations operate within the established frameworks and what measures they employ to work towards CSA prevention. The challenges faced by the government and NGOs (RQ 2) may stem from gaps in institutional frameworks. By employing institutional theory as a lens, this study can examine the specific deficiencies in laws, policies, or governance structures that contribute to these challenges. This understanding will illuminate the systemic barriers that impede effective progress in addressing CSA. Analysing the effectiveness of governmental approaches (RQ 3) through the lens of institutional theory enables a comprehensive assessment of whether existing policies and regulations are sufficient

and effectively enforced. Moreover, it enables evaluation of the government's capacity to adapt and strengthen institutional support systems, thereby enhancing its effectiveness in combating CSA.

In conclusion, institutional theory underpins this study by highlighting the need for robust institutional frameworks to combat CSA in the Maldives. It offers a theoretical foundation for exploring the interactions between governmental and non-governmental organisations. It provides insights into how these entities can bolster accountability and governance to address issues related to child sexual abuse effectively. By understanding the institutional context, stakeholders can better strategize to enhance the responsiveness and effectiveness of the measures in place, thereby improving outcomes for victims and the community.

2.12.2 Ecological Systems Theory

Urie Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory provides a comprehensive framework for understanding the multifaceted influences on a child's development. It illustrates how various environmental systems interact to shape individual experiences. The theory posits that child development occurs within a nested structure of five interrelated systems: the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem, and chronosystem. These systems significantly influence children's growth, particularly in addressing critical issues such as CSA.

The microsystem represents the immediate environment in which a child lives, encompassing family, school, peers, and direct interactions. In the context of CSA, this system is fundamental because the child's initial experiences with family dynamics and peer relationships significantly impact their emotional well-being and sense of security. Understanding how families operate and support the child is crucial, as a nurturing home environment can serve as both a protective factor against CSA and a support system for victims. For instance, strong parental support can encourage children to speak out against abuse, while a lack of support or a hostile home environment may lead to silence and further victimisation. This relates to RQ 1 by examining how the Maldives' government and NGOs address familial influences on CSA.

Within the mesosystem, interactions among microsystems, such as the relationship between home and school, become paramount. A child who encounters bullying at school but has a supportive home may face conflicting influences that affect

their psychological stability. This interplay is critical when considering interventions for CSA victims, as collaboration between parents, educators, and social services can significantly enhance a child's resilience and capacity to confront their experiences of abuse. The effectiveness of CSA prevention and response initiatives can be bolstered by fostering communication and support networks. This addresses RQ 1 by highlighting collaborative approaches to addressing CSA.

The exosystem includes broader external systems, such as a parent's work environment or community resources, that indirectly influence a child's life. For instance, if a parent struggles with unemployment or a high-stress job, this can create an unstable environment for the child, increasing vulnerability to CSA. In the Maldives, analysing community resources and access to services for victims of abuse, such as counselling, legal support, and medical care, falls within this system. Understanding these external factors is vital for identifying gaps and developing comprehensive support mechanisms for children affected by CSA. This ties into RQ 2, which explores the challenges NGOs and government entities face in providing adequate resources for CSA.

The macrosystem consists of cultural, social, and economic factors that shape the context in which children develop. Cultural attitudes towards child welfare, gender roles, and societal norms profoundly influence how CSA is perceived and addressed. In the Maldives, prevailing cultural beliefs can create barriers to reporting and seeking help for CSA. The stigma associated with child abuse may prevent victims from coming forward and lead to a culture of silence. Recognising these cultural dynamics is crucial when designing interventions and policies to address CSA in a culturally sensitive manner. This relates to RQ 2 by identifying the challenges posed by cultural attitudes on CSA and how these factors complicate the work of governmental and non-governmental organisations.

Lastly, the chronosystem refers to the dimension of time, encompassing life transitions and sociohistorical events that can impact development. Factors such as shifts in family structures, economic changes, and significant socio-political events can alter the landscape of child protection practices over time. For example, understanding historical trends related to CSA reports in the Maldives can shed light on how societal attitudes and legal frameworks have evolved. This knowledge is essential for developing responsive strategies to adapt to changing circumstances and effectively

address CSA. This ties into RQ 3 by examining how the government adapts its CSA approaches over time in response to evolving factors.

By utilising Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory as a foundational framework, this study can adopt a holistic perspective on CSA, recognising the intricate interplay of individual, familial, community, and societal factors that influence child protection efforts. This theoretical underpinning encourages a comprehensive analysis of the multi-layered realities of child sexual abuse in the Maldives, facilitating the development of informed and effective interventions.

2.12.3 Social Learning Theory

Social Learning Theory (SLT), developed by psychologist Albert Bandura, posits that individuals learn through observation, imitation, and modelling within their social environments. This theory asserts that learning occurs not only through direct experiences but also through observing others' behaviours, their outcomes, and the social models surrounding them. Central to SLT is the idea that cognitive processes play a crucial role in learning; individuals actively process and store information about observed behaviours, which can subsequently influence their future actions. Key components of SLT include observation, in which individuals learn new behaviours by watching others, and imitation, in which they replicate these behaviours, especially when they perceive a relationship with the model observed. Furthermore, the outcomes of these behaviours significantly affect their likelihood of adoption; positive reinforcement can encourage imitation, while punishment may deter it.

This study examines the measures, challenges, and effective approaches used by the government and NGOs to address CSA in the Maldives. Understanding CSA through the lens of Social Learning Theory can provide valuable insights into how societal attitudes and behaviours surrounding CSA are formed and changed, aligning closely with the proposed research questions. The first research question (RQ 1) investigates how the Maldives' government and NGOs address CSA. It can be analysed through SLT by examining how these organisations model appropriate behaviours and responses to CSA. For instance, if organisations implement educational programs that demonstrate healthy family dynamics and effective responses to abuse, community members may be more likely to adopt and replicate these behaviours within their social circles, ultimately aiding in the prevention of CSA.

The second research question (RQ 2) addresses the challenges faced by the Maldives' government and NGOs in tackling CSA. Within the SLT framework, one can analyse the barriers to effective modelling and imitation within communities. Cultural norms and social stigmas may impede the observation and imitation of positive behaviours related to CSA. If strong societal taboos exist around discussing CSA, individuals may feel discouraged from engaging with educational materials or seeking help, when necessary, thereby perpetuating cycles of abuse. This illustrates how the lack of observable, positive examples can hinder progress in addressing CSA and highlights the importance of creating an environment conducive to open dialogue and learning.

The third research question (RQ 3) focuses on how the Maldives' government effectively addresses CSA, suggesting an exploration of the role of reinforcement in the success of interventions. When initiatives from government and NGOs receive positive reinforcement—whether through community acceptance, funding, or favourable policy responses—they may further encourage observable, desirable behaviours regarding CSA reporting and prevention. Programs that effectively communicate the benefits of addressing CSA, particularly when exemplified by positive case outcomes, can foster imitative behaviours among community members. Thus, applying the principles of SLT enables a comprehensive understanding of how interventions can be structured to promote positive change in perceptions and behaviours related to CSA.

In summary, Social Learning Theory provides a solid framework for analysing the measures, challenges, and effective approaches to addressing child sexual abuse in the Maldives. By examining how behaviours are learned through observation and how social contexts influence them, this study can enhance understanding of the dynamics surrounding CSA and the effectiveness of various interventions. Analysing the findings in the context of SLT can reveal potential strategies to improve educational programs. Not only that, but it can overcome resistance to change and promote positive behavioural models in the ongoing efforts to tackle CSA in the Maldives.

2.13 Theoretical Framework

As illustrated in Figure 2.2, the theoretical framework for this study integrates three key theories to provide a comprehensive understanding of CSA and the contextual factors influencing its occurrence, prevention, and intervention in the Maldives.

Institutional Theory emphasises the role of both governmental and non-governmental institutions in shaping responses to CSA, highlighting how policies, regulations, and institutional frameworks impact the effectiveness of measures aimed at combating child sexual abuse. Meanwhile, Ecological Systems Theory, developed by Urie Bronfenbrenner, focuses on the multiple layers of environmental influence on an individual's development. In the context of CSA, this theory examines how factors at the individual, family, societal, and community levels can affect a child's vulnerability to abuse, as well as the response mechanisms available for addressing such incidents.

Lastly, Social Learning Theory posits that behaviours are learned through observation and interaction within social contexts. This theory is crucial for understanding how societal norms and attitudes towards CSA can either perpetuate or prevent abuse, emphasising the role of education and community norms in shaping behaviours related to CSA. Together, these theories offer a holistic perspective on the complexities surrounding child sexual abuse, informing strategies for effective intervention and prevention.

The theoretical framework comprises several critical components that collectively address CSA from a multifaceted perspective. At the individual level, the focus is on the child, considering the psychological and behavioural factors that influence their experience of abuse. This level also considers the role of personal agency in reporting incidents and seeking help. Moving to the family level, the dynamics within the household are examined, particularly the relationships with biological family members, guardians, or caretakers. Family support systems ensure a child's safety and facilitate recovery.

At the societal level, broader influences come into play, encompassing peer groups, school environments, and community involvement. Children's relationships with friends and peers significantly impact their experiences and perceptions of safety. NGOs are highlighted as pivotal actors within this framework, engaged in advocacy, support, and educational initiatives to prevent CSA and assist victims. Their local and international efforts are crucial in implementing effective measures and influencing policy.

The framework further explores the policy level, examining existing laws, regulations, and policies related to CSA, as well as the processes involved in their implementation and enforcement. This includes collaborating between government institutions and NGOs to advance policy advocacy and create a more supportive

environment for victims. Finally, the prosecution level is addressed, focusing on the legal frameworks and judicial processes established to handle cases of CSA. This aspect highlights the significant roles of law enforcement, child protection agencies, and the judicial system in prosecuting offenders, ensuring justice and protecting children. Together, these components create a comprehensive understanding of the complexities surrounding child sexual abuse and the necessary approaches to combat it effectively.

The theoretical framework provides a holistic view of the complex interplay between individual, familial, societal, and institutional factors influencing child sexual abuse in the Maldives. By integrating these theories, this study seeks to identify effective measures, address challenges, and foster collaboration between the government and NGOs to tackle CSA and protect children. This framework informs the research methodology and guides the interpretation of findings and the formulation of actionable recommendations.

THEORETICAL GUIDING FRAMFAVORK

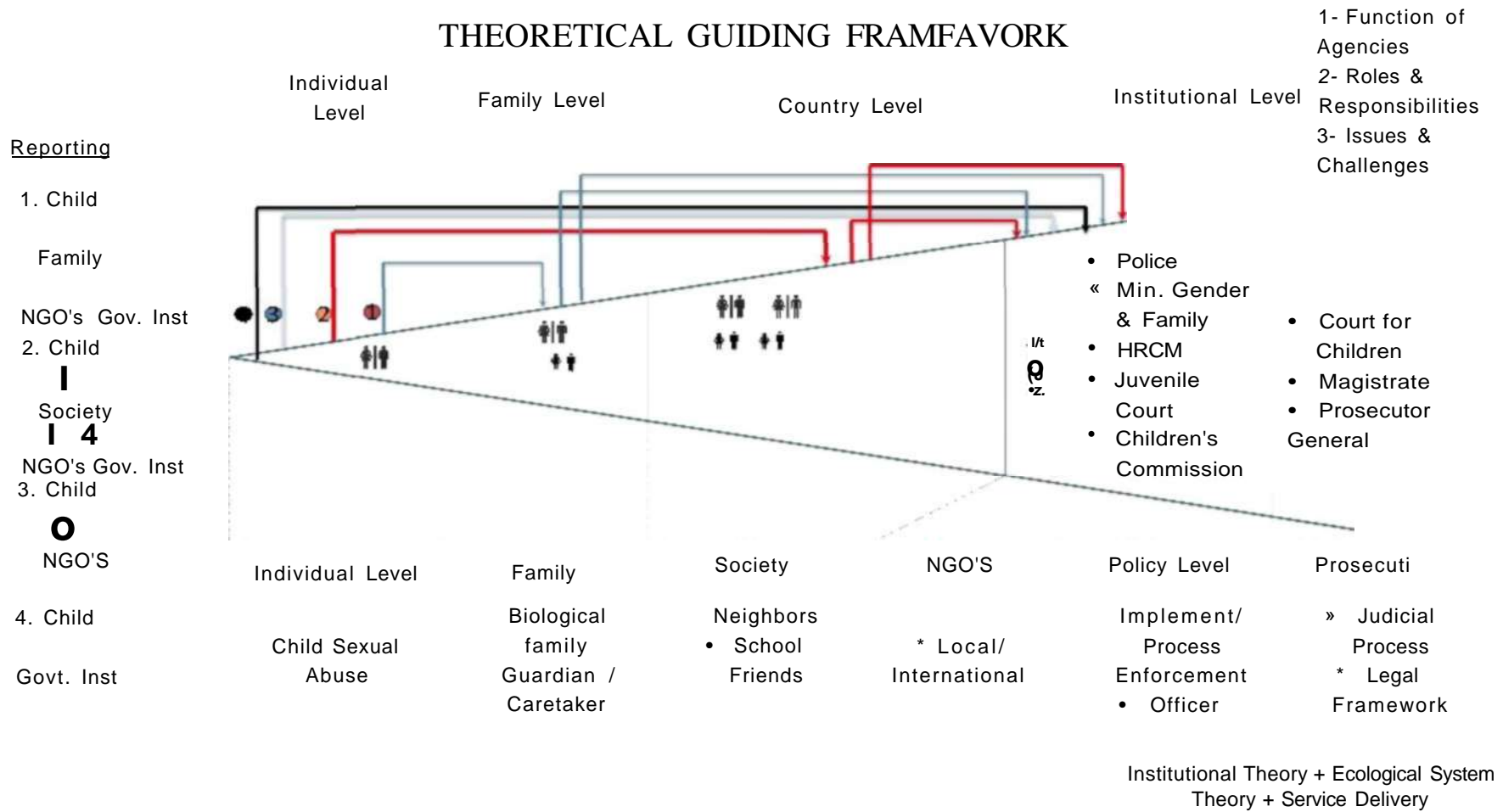


Figure 2.2 Theoretical Framework

2.14 Summary

CSA poses a massive threat to children, especially in the Maldives. This review presents a comprehensive description of the causes of CSA, ranging from individual-level factors to broader social factors. The interconnections among these factors underscore the need for a holistic model to prevent CSA and to effectively intervene in it. By examining existing policies and key authorities, this analysis also identifies what has been effective and what has not in addressing this crucial issue. There are many obstacles, as highlighted during the review, to establishing a safe environment for children. However, identifying and addressing these issues, as well as promoting community awareness and education, can reduce the prevalence of CSA. The findings from this chapter provide a solid basis for addressing CSA in this study. Chapter 3 describes the method used to address the research questions and achieve the research objectives.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

Chapter 3 presents the research methodology employed in this study, focusing on exploring child sexual abuse in the Maldives. This chapter outlines the philosophical underpinnings that guide the research, the design adopted to achieve the study objectives, and the specific units of analysis utilised. Additionally, it details the sample size and inclusion criteria that ensure a representative and relevant population for this study. This chapter sets the foundation for effective data collection and analysis by employing robust sampling techniques and clearly defined research instruments. Overall, the methodological framework established herein aims to provide a systematic approach that enhances the reliability and validity of the findings.

3.2 Research Philosophy

Research was a systematic investigation aimed at contributing to the development of knowledge and understanding of its nature (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2009). It is a systematic investigation that contributes to the broader body of knowledge and understanding of the nature of that knowledge (Saunders et al., 2009). Creswell (2013) noted that philosophy was critical for informing research by drawing on abstract ideas and beliefs to explicate the assumptions underlying the research process. Creswell (2013) stated that researchers also made certain assumptions about the world's general ontology, which served as the foundation for their research philosophy. By drawing on prior knowledge, they can identify the most suitable strategies and methods to support their research (Saunders et al., 2009).

This study aimed to investigate government and non-governmental organisations in the Maldives addressing CSA. This study asserted that gathering insights from government officials and NGOs was critical because they possessed the most relevant knowledge. Words and other non-numerical findings were used to analyse the data collected for this study, given their potential to offer a richer interpretation. This knowledge was generated through an in-depth, iterative process between this study

and its participants. This study highlighted the importance of participants' voices in illustrating the complexities of CSA in the Maldives, employing qualitative methods.

Additionally, this study aimed to identify the real challenges faced by the government and NGOs in fulfilling their roles and responsibilities to curb CSA in the Maldives. In keeping with this objective, this study was guided by social constructivist insights, examining how knowledge and understanding are constructed through individuals' personal experiences in their particular contexts (Creswell, 2008). The following chapter breaks down the qualitative handpicked methodology underpinning this study. Focusing on subjectivity provided scope to explore the complex dynamics at play in child protection.

Not surprisingly, three explicit dimensions are typically used to analyse the paradigmatic tradition of research: ontological, epistemological, and methodological (Guba, 1990). These dimensions are supplemented by axiology, a branch of research philosophy that involves value judgments and assessments. Ontology and epistemology demonstrate how reality is studied through the lens of the social constructivist perspective (McLachlan & Garcia, 2015). The ontological dimension concerns the nature of reality (Guba, 1990). For this study, it was essential to acknowledge that multiple realities exist and that no single foundation exists on which to build them. This study engaged individuals from government ministries and the non-governmental sector who directly address CSAB in the Maldives to understand their lived experiences and perspectives.

In the epistemological dimension, constructivist or interpretivist positions emphasise that knowledge should be grounded in subjectivity rather than objectivity (Guba, 1990). This position recognises that reality and knowledge exist in others' minds, suggesting that exploring this knowledge requires subjective interactions between the researcher and participants (Guba, 1990). Thus, this study was inherently subjective and aimed to provide a comprehensive description of the organisation's roles and responsibilities. Insights on the challenges faced by the government and NGOs in adequately responding to CSA in the Maldives were prioritised, with emphasis on their views and lived experiences.

The term "methodology" was used to refer to strategic inquiry (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000) and encompassed multiple inquiry styles. Hermeneutics and dialectics were two essential components in this investigation that helped reach a consensus across several constructs. Hermeneutics was primarily devoted to accurately describing

individual constructs, while dialectics focused on their comparison and contrast (Guba, 1990). The constructs collected from the participants were accurately interpreted in this study. A systematic comparison of the findings enabled the development of appropriate, nuanced concepts regarding CSA in the Maldives. It allows for more informed recommendations to meet the country's needs.

3.3 Research Design

Figure 3.1 illustrates the research onion adapted from Saunders, Lewis, and Thornhill (2007), which outlines the different layers involved in designing a research study. Each layer represented crucial components of a comprehensive research methodology. In this study, the research onion provided a structured approach to justify the chosen methodology.

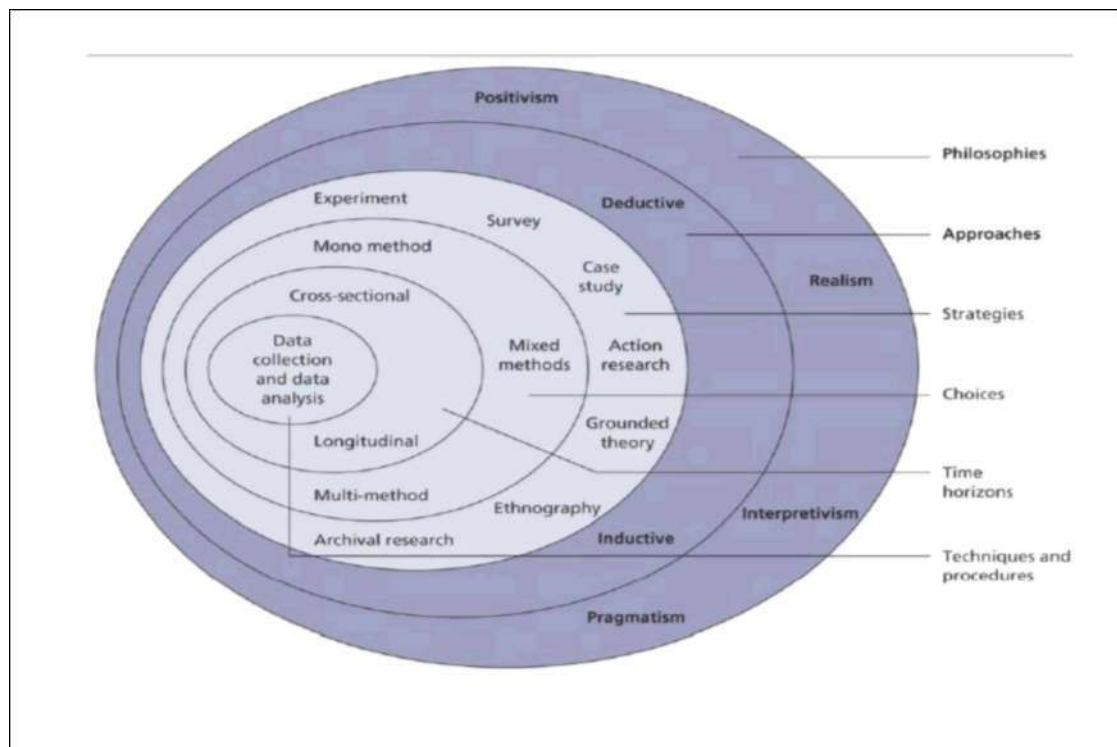


Figure 3.1 Research Onion Adapted from Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill (2007)

3.3.1 Philosophy

This study's interpretive research philosophy explored the diverse experiences and complexities of working with CSA from the perspectives of the various stakeholders involved. This philosophical approach enabled this study to examine the meanings and interpretations of the measures, challenges, and effective approaches used by the government and NGOs to address CSA in the Maldives. This focus on context and participant experiences helped us gain a nuanced understanding of the measures, challenges, and effective methods for addressing them.

3.3.2 Approach

A deductive approach was applied in this study to explore the measures, challenges, and effective approaches used by the government and NGOs to address CSA in the Maldives. This study is grounded in established theories, specifically Institutional Theory, Ecological Systems Theory, and Social Learning Theory. Using these theories, this study established a structured framework for qualitative interviews with representatives from government and NGO organisations. This study examined how the government and NGOs addressed CSA through interviews, which served as the primary data collection method. This study examines whether participants' insights align with or contradict the existing literature.

In summary, the deductive method employed in this study enabled the systematic examination of the observed measures, obstacles, and successful strategies implemented by the government and NGOs in the Maldives. The deductive approach is suitable for this qualitative study. It enables the current study to ground the research in existing theories, predetermine the research questions, and systematically analyse the data. This then translates into action-oriented intelligence that can contribute to the ongoing process of responding to and preventing child sexual abuse in the Maldives.

3.3.3 Strategy

Data were collected through interviews as part of the qualitative strategy, enabling this study to gather in-depth information from key stakeholders, government and NGOs, involved in addressing CSA. This strategy was deemed most suitable for understanding the measures, challenges, and effective approaches participants used.

Engaging with government and NGOs ensured that the findings were robust and reflective of the broader landscape of CSA prevention in the Maldives.

3.3.4 Choice

This study utilised a mono-method approach, collecting only qualitative data through interviews. This study aimed to explore the measures, challenges, and effective approaches used by the government and NGOs to address CSA in the Maldives. Qualitative interviews provided rich, in-depth insights. The choice of a mono-method allowed for direct engagement with participants, facilitating discussions that revealed organisational experiences, perspectives, and the complexities of CSA.

3.3.5 Time Horizon

This study employed a cross-sectional time horizon, collecting data simultaneously to capture the contemporary landscape of CSA prevention efforts in the Maldives. This design enabled the immediate analysis of stakeholders' experiences and perceptions, eliminating the complications associated with longitudinal data collection. By focusing on the current context, this study highlighted how recent developments and social dynamics influence the effectiveness of implementing measures to combat CSA. This time frame was especially relevant given the evolving policies and societal attitudes toward child protection.

3.3.6 Techniques and Procedures

This study utilised structured interview questions as the sole data collection method and analysed the data using NVivo. This study's qualitative approach was essential, as it aimed to explore the measures, challenges, and effective approaches employed by the government and NGOs to address CSA in the Maldives. The structured interviews enabled consistent data collection across all participants, ensuring that key topics were covered while allowing individual perspectives to be expressed. Following data collection, thematic analysis was conducted in NVivo to identify, analyse, and report patterns and themes within the responses. This approach enabled a deeper understanding of the complexities of CSA. Through thematic analysis, this study

identified significant themes related to measures, challenges, and effective approaches, as highlighted in Chapter 4.

This study follows Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step thematic analysis framework, as outlined in Table 3.1. This six-phase thematic analysis framework provides a systematic, adaptable framework for identifying patterns and insights into the measures, challenges, and effective strategies used by government agencies and NGOs to combat CSA in the Maldives. The approach commenced with familiarisation, during which all interview recordings were fully transcribed and reviewed multiple times to immerse the researcher in the material. Preliminary observations and contemplations were documented during this phase to record nascent concepts. During the second phase, initial coding was performed manually and subsequently verified with qualitative data analysis tools. Both semantic (surface-level) and latent (underlying meaning) codes were produced to guarantee a comprehensive interpretation of the data.

During the third phase, the codes were categorised and clustered to identify probable themes associated with current intervention measures, systemic and operational issues, and effective practices. In Phase Four, these themes were further refined and evaluated by juxtaposing them with the coded extracts and the comprehensive dataset to ensure internal consistency and coherence. In phase five, topics were delineated and aptly designated to encapsulate their essence and pertinence to the study enquiries. The concluding part entailed composing an analytical narrative, bolstered by illustrative quotations, which offered a comprehensive and contextualised insight into the realities of CSA response initiatives in the Maldives.

Triangulation was employed at multiple levels to enhance the credibility and depth of the analysis. This study utilised primary data obtained from comprehensive interviews with informants from government ministries, child protection officers, police officials, and NGO representatives. Not only that, but this study also uses secondary data sources, including national CSA policy documents, annual reports, legal frameworks, and pertinent media coverage. This methodological triangulation enabled the researcher to corroborate findings and gain a more nuanced understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the existing system.

Several measures were implemented to mitigate researcher bias. A reflective notebook was maintained throughout the research process to monitor personal preconceptions and foster critical self-awareness. Peer debriefing was conducted with an academic colleague to evaluate codes and themes, providing an external perspective

and enhancing analytical rigour. Additionally, member verification was conducted with selected participants to validate the interpretation of significant themes and ensure that the findings accurately reflected their experiences and perspectives. A comprehensive record of proceedings was maintained to document all phases of the investigation, including decisions on theme development and the rationale for coding, ensuring transparency and reliability.

This comprehensive and reflective methodology ensured that the final study accurately represented the intricacies of the CSA response framework in the Maldives, delivering reliable, evidence-based insights to guide future policy and practice.

Table 3.1

Example of the Thematic Analysis Process Performed by this Study for Research Objective 1 (Theme 1): Guided by Braun and Clarke's (2006) 6-Step Framework

Research Objective 1 Existing measures to address child sexual abuse (CSA) in the Maldives

Final Theme Implementation of Guidelines and Procedures (As presented in Chapter 4 under Section 4.3.1)

Example of the quote "A set procedure and guideline for providing a safe place for children from their abusers has been emphasised. These guidelines must not be just on paper but effectively implemented" (GOV 1)

Step 1: Become Familiar with the Data In this step, the study immerses itself in qualitative data from interviews and relevant documents, focusing on participants' insights into the implementation of guidelines and procedures for addressing CSA. The goal is to understand the context, the participants' perspectives, and the significance of these procedures in safeguarding children. Analysing transcripts enables this study to identify key points, common phrases, and specific concerns raised by participants regarding existing guidelines.

Step 2: Generate During this phase, initial codes are generated from the specific content of the data. For example:

Initial Codes	<p>Safety Protocols: References to the procedures designed to create a safe environment for children.</p> <p>Advocacy for Action: The call for proactive measures rather than passive adherence to guidelines.</p> <p>These codes provide an initial view of the data, capturing distinct aspects mentioned by the participant.</p>
Step 3: Search for Themes	<p>In this step, this study organises the initial codes into broader themes.</p> <p>The codes generated in Step 2 were clustered into a theme that specifically captures the essence of participants' experiences regarding the practical application of guidelines. For instance, the theme "Implementation of Guidelines and Procedures" would emerge, reflecting participants' emphasis on the need for these guidelines to be actionable rather than just on paper.</p>
Step 4: Review Themes	<p>This study revisits the data to substantiate the theme across multiple participant quotes and insights. This review reveals additional nuances or patterns. At this stage, the theme is refined to represent the data while ensuring consistency and accuracy.</p>
Define Themes	<p>In this step, the theme is clearly defined and articulated. For "Implementation of Guidelines and Procedures," the definition was: "This theme captures the necessity of translating written guidelines into actionable procedures that effectively protect children from abuse. It reflects participants' concerns that, while guidelines exist, their successful implementation relies on collaborative efforts, adequate resources, and ongoing oversight."</p>
Step 6: Write-Up	<p>The final write-up on the theme would elaborate on its significance in relation to the research question and illustrate how it addresses the broader inquiry into existing measures to address CSA in the Maldives. For example, refer to Chapter 4, Section 4.3.1, "Implementation of Guidelines and Procedures."</p>

3.4 Unit of Analysis

The primary aim of this study is to explore the measures, challenges, and effective approaches used by the government and NGOs to address CSA in the Maldives. In this study, the unit of analysis is the organisations involved in addressing CSA in the Maldives, specifically both government agencies and NGOs. This dual focus enables a comprehensive understanding of the measures, challenges, and effective approaches to combating CSA in the region. Governmental bodies play a crucial role in creating policies, implementing laws, and providing resources for the prevention and response to CSA. Besides, NGOs complement government efforts, often providing direct services to victims, raising awareness, and advocating for policy changes.

3.5 Sample Size and Inclusion Criteria

This study only focuses on participants from government and non-government organisations. Table 3.2 summarises all 36 participants in this study. Dworkin (2012) suggests that the sample size for a qualitative study can be anywhere from 5 to 50 participants, so the sample size of this study is considered adequate, acceptable, and valid. The inclusion criteria for each group of participants selected for this study are that the representative must have experience and expertise in CSA. All these 36 participants are from:

Government Organisations:

- 1) President's Office (Former President, Former Vice President)
- 2) Ministry of Gender, Family and Social Services (Now known as Ministry of Social and Family Development)
- 3) Maldives Police Services
- 4) Ministry of Education
- 5) Parliament
- 6) Supreme Court
- 7) Criminal Court
- 8) Atoll Council
- 9) Prosecutor General's Office
- 10) Attorney General's Office
- 11) Indira Gandhi Memorial Hospital

- 12) Police Integrity Commission
- 13) Maldives National University
- 14) Family Protection Authority
- 15) Child and Family Protection Services
- 16) Children's Ombudspersons Office

NGOs:

- 1) UNICEF
- 2) Advocating the Rights of Children
- 3) Hope for Women

Table 3.2
Participants (Representatives from Government and NGOs), Designation, and Pseudonym

Person	Designation	Pseudonym (Used in Chapter 4)
1. Doctor	Doctor Gynaecologist (IGMH)	GOV 1
2. Former Vice President of the Republic of Maldives	Vice President, July- November 2015 / Former Minister of Tourism	GOV 2
3. Former President of the Republic of Maldives/ President of the People's Majlis	President 2008 - February 2012	GOV 3
4. State Minister of the Ministry of Home Affairs/ Former Minister's Secretary	State Minister of the Ministry of Home Affairs	GOV 4
5. Attorney General's Office	Former Attorney/ Lawyer	GOV 5
6. Prosecutor General's Office	Lawyer	GOV 6
7. Gdh. Island	Chief head	GOV 7
8. Prosecutor General's Office	Prosecutor General	GOV 8
9. Former Parliament Member		GOV 9

10. Former Vice President of the Republic of Maldives/ Former Minister of Justice/ Former Minister of Aviation and Communication/ Former Minister of Home Affairs	Vice President Nov (2013) - July 2015/ Minister of Justice 2005-2007 Former Minister of Aviation and Communication, 2008-2009 Former Minister of Home Affairs 2012-2013	GOV 10
11. Maldives National University	Lecturer	GOV 11
12. Parliament Member	Since 2009 to Date,	GOV 12
13. Maldives Police Service	Sub Inspector	GOV 13
14. Police Integrity Commission/ Former Senior Investigation Officer HRCM	Vice President of the National Integrity Commission for the past 3 years/ Previously worked at HRCM for 12 years as a Senior Investigation Officer	GOV 14
15. Family Protection Authority	FPA Head	GOV 15
16. Children's Ombudspersons Office	Children Ombudsperson	GOV 16
17. Supreme Court	Judge	GOV 17
18. Maldives Police Service	Former Commissioner	GOV 18
19. Children's Ombudspersons Office	Director	GOV 19
20. Advocating the Rights of Children	Chairperson	NGO20
21. Prosecutor General's Office	Former PG	GOV 21
22. Former Minister of Education/ Former Mayor of the capital city of the Maldives	Education Minister from February 2010 to February 2012, Mayor from 2017 to 2021	GOV 22

23. Ministry of Gender, Social Security	Former Gender Minister from	GOV 23
24. Children's Ombudspersons Office	Investigation Officer / Lawyer	GOV 24
25. Hope for Women	Chairperson / Former Monitoring Officer at HRCM	NGO 25
26. Attorney General's Office	Former Attorney / Lawyer	GOV 26
27. HRCM	Former Commissioner of	GOV 27
28. Child and Family Protection Services	Child Protection Coordinator	GOV 28
29. Parliament Member		GOV 29
30. N. Island	Chief Head	GOV 30
31. Criminal Court	Judge	GOV 31
32. Maldives Police Service	DCP	GOV 32
33. UNICEF	Child Protection Specialist	NGO 33
34. Ministry Of Education	Official	GOV 34
35. Supreme Court	Judge	GOV 35
36. Iskhandhar School	Leading Teacher	GOV 36

The significant imbalance in the number of participants from government organisations compared to NGOs in this study can be attributed to several key factors. First, government organisations typically have broader mandates and responsibilities for child protection and the prevention of CSA. The broad range encompasses many institutions with a direct role in policy, executive discretion, or implementation. In the country, several state institutions, including the Ministry of Gender, Family, and Social Services, the Maldives Police Service, and the Supreme Court, all contribute to addressing CSA. This complexity fosters diversity in involvement, as more government participants are involved, reflecting the multifaceted nature of government intervention in this area.

Second, stakeholder access significantly contributes to the imbalance in participants. Contact with public authorities could be fertile ground for recruitment, as they handle CSA issues, which could lead to higher representation. Government

officials often have organised mechanisms for engagement and are usually more willing to participate in research studies, resulting in higher representation. In comparison, NGOs, whose contributions to child protection are vital, may have more limited resources or fewer staff; consequently, a relatively small number participated in this study.

Third, the organisational structures between government bodies and NGOs differ profoundly. Government agencies typically have hierarchical structures and larger workforces, particularly in areas such as child development and law enforcement. This allows these agencies to add multiple members at different levels. Instead, NGOs are often staffed by smaller groups of people who may have fewer resources to represent NGO interests in research. However, this difference reflects the realities of the workforce's current state, and government agencies can offer a broader range of views because they overlap so much.

Finally, this study's restricted number of NGOs reflects the overall landscape of organisations working on child protection issues in the Maldives. The NGOs engaged in this work, such as UNICEF, advocating for the Rights of Women, and Hope for Women, are indispensable in their respective spheres. However, they play a relatively minor role compared to that of government organisations. The smaller number of participants from this sector can be justified because these NGOs tend to be smaller and/or less broadly based.

In summary, although the representation of members from government institutions and NGOs seems uneven, it reflects the structural and practical context of child protection work in the Maldives. The high percentage of government participants indicates broad awareness of the state of CSA response, and NGO representation will provide critical perspectives on advocacy and civil society work. This input from players on the ground is expected to contribute to a comprehensive study of efforts and barriers to addressing CSA in the country.

3.6 Sampling Techniques

In this study, purposive and snowball sampling techniques were employed to identify participants, including representatives of government and NGOs. The purposive sampling method was used first, meaning that participants were deliberately selected based on specific characteristics relevant to this study (Bryman, 2012). This

method enabled the study to focus on those with the most valuable knowledge of preventive and responsive measures related to CSA in the Maldives. Access to these key figures within different organisations, namely the Ministry of Gender, Family and Social Services, Maldives Police Services, and prominent NGOs such as UNICEF, Advocating the Rights of Children, and Hope for Women, would provide this study with a pool of knowledge and expertise that could contribute to the information collected. Purposive sampling involved selecting representatives from government agencies directly responsible for CSA programs and from NGOs working with victims and advocating for their rights. This study applied criteria such as profession, years of experience, and participation in CSA programs to identify participants who could provide rich insights into actions, obstacles, and strategies for responding to CSA. This thoughtful selection process ensured that the subjects were well prepared to provide relevant information in answering the study's research questions.

After the first group of participants was selected through purposive sampling, the snowball sampling method was used to recruit additional participants. According to Bryman (2012), snowball sampling begins with an existing population of individuals and encourages participants to bring in others who may also be relevant to the study. For example, after an interview with a key informant at an NGO dedicated to the rights of CSA victims, such as Advocating the Rights of Children, that informant might recommend another NGO or government contact involved in the work. It was essential to obtain these referrals to broaden the range of participants and gather diverse opinions. Snowball sampling could also recruit additional participants, as the key informants knew other stakeholders with similar experiences and interests. This approach was efficient, given the interconnectedness of the network of people and organisations working on CSA in the Maldives. Utilising these relationships, this study obtained multiple perspectives on strategies, challenges, and best practices for addressing CSA.

Using purposive and snowball sampling, this study individually described the depth and breadth of the phenomenon. Purposive sampling enabled us to build a solid initial group of informed individuals, and snowball sampling ensured this study achieved breadth of perspectives and diversity among our participants. This methodological approach enabled the collection of rich data. It also highlights the complexities of CSA in the Maldives and offers valuable insights into effective prevention and response strategies.

3.7 Research Instrument

This study focused on the measures, challenges, and effective approaches used by the government and NGOs to address CSA in the Maldives. Semi-structured interviews were chosen for this study because they are guided. It provides standard questions while keeping the participants and researcher comfortable, allowing the conversation to flow naturally. A semi-structured interview uses an interview guide, a list of general, relevant questions. Thus, in this study, participants initially received broad queries about their background and qualifications, followed by more pointed questions about their experiences and perspectives. All patient responses were kept strictly confidential and used solely for this study. The interview questions were systematically organised to align with the study's objectives and sufficiently address each aspect of its focus.

One-on-one interviews were the method of choice for this study. Creswell (2014) described it as well suited to capturing responses from articulate individuals willing to share their experiences and opinions in an interview setting. This format allowed participants to explore their ideas about CSA in the Maldives. One-on-one interviews are a data collection method in which a single participant answers questions (Creswell, 2009), yielding rich qualitative data. Focusing on one issue at a time created a space where sensitive topics could be discussed comfortably. Listed below are the tentative questions for participants in this study. The purpose is to elicit in-depth responses regarding their knowledge of their role and experience working within the framework of child protection and responding to abuse in the Maldives.

- 1) Please introduce yourself and describe your work experience in this organisation.
- 2) Based on your experience, can you share the seriousness of CSA in the Maldives in terms of rape, incest, molestation, and exploitation?
- 3) Based on your experience, could you share your organisation's roles and responsibilities in dealing with CSA in the Maldives (Government/ NGO)?
- 4) What are the Maldives' policies and Acts related to CSA? Children's Act, Special Provisions or Acts to deal with sexual abuse offenders of children?
- 5) What are the challenges and issues that you face in dealing with CSA issues? (Government/NGO)

- 6) As we know, dealing with child abuse issues is a very complex process. Based on your experience, could you suggest the best approach for us to take in dealing with this issue?
- 7) Do you have any other suggestions or recommendations to address CSA issues effectively?

3.7.1 Interview Protocol

An interview protocol is a form developed for this study that includes instructions for the interview process, the questions to be asked, and space to take notes on the interviewee's responses (Creswell, 2012). The interview protocols for the government and NGOs are as follows.

Title: Exploring Child Sexual Abuse (CSA) in the Maldives: Measures Challenges, and Effective Approaches from Government and NGOs.

Time of Interview:

Date:

Place:

Interviewer:

Interviewee:

Position of Interviewee:

The interviewee (participant) will be provided with a brief description of this study, its purpose, the use of the data, and the confidentiality of the interview. The confidentiality of the data and the duration of the interview will also be explained.

Questions:

- 1) Please introduce yourself and describe your work experience in this organisation.
- 2) Based on your experience, can you please share with me the seriousness of CSA in the Maldives in terms of rape, incest, molestation, and exploitation?
- 3) Based on your experience, please share your organisation's roles and responsibilities in dealing with CSA in the Maldives (Government/ NGO).
- 4) What are the Maldives' policies and Acts related to CSA? Children's Act, Special Provisions or Acts to deal with sexual abuse offenders of children.
- 5) What are the challenges and issues that you face in dealing with CSA issues? (Government/NGO).
- 6) As we know, dealing with child abuse issues is a very complex process. Based on your experience, could you please suggest the most effective approach for us to address this issue?
- 7) Do you have any other suggestions or recommendations to address CSA issues effectively?

Thank the participants for their cooperation and participation in this interview. Assure them of the confidentiality of their responses and the possibility of future interviews.

3.8 Qualitative Validity (Face Validity and Content Validity): Expert-Driven Pre-Test and Participant-Driven Pre-Test

This study aimed to establish qualitative validity by employing expert- and participant-driven pretests in May 2023 to assess face and content validity. For the expert-driven pretest, both supervisors, as experts in the social sciences, evaluated the study, including interview questions for clarity and relevance. They provided feedback on the appearance of the interview questions and whether they adequately measured the intended aspects. This is to ensure that the tools were understandable and pertinent from a professional perspective aligned with the study's research objectives and questions. In addition to face validity, the experts examined content validity, assessing how well the interview questions covered the breadth and depth of the aspects being studied. Their analysis facilitated alignment with this study's theoretical framework and objectives, leading to revisions that strengthened the instruments.

A participant-driven pretest was conducted to further validate the interview questions, during which four representatives from the target population (including

government officials and NGO representatives) reviewed them. Their feedback focused on the clarity and relevance of each item, based on their personal experiences, ensuring that the language and context resonated with potential participants. By integrating expert- and participant-driven approaches, this study effectively addressed critical aspects of qualitative validity, thereby enhancing the credibility and suitability of the interview questions for the intended population (government and NGOs) in exploring measures, challenges, and effective approaches to addressing CSA in the Maldives.

3.9 Qualitative Reliability

In this study, the primary aim was to explore the measures, challenges, and effective approaches employed by government and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in addressing child sexual abuse (CSA) in the Maldives. To ensure the qualitative reliability of the findings, specific strategies were employed throughout the research process. First, this study employed structured interview questions to create consistency in data collection. This approach minimised response variability, enabling a more standardised means to gather participant information. By using the same set of questions for all interviews, this study aimed to enhance the reliability of the findings by ensuring that each participant was asked about the same critical issues related to CSA prevention.

Additionally, this study incorporated member checking to bolster reliability. After collecting and analysing the data, participants were provided with summaries of their responses and the findings. This allowed them to verify the accuracy of the data and the interpretation of their contributions, thus adding another layer of credibility to this study. Using NVivo for data analysis further enhanced reliability by enabling systematic coding and thematic analysis of the interview data. This software facilitated the identification of recurring themes and patterns, ensuring that the conclusions drawn were based on the evidence presented rather than the researcher's bias.

Moreover, detailed documentation of the research process, including the rationale for methodological choices and the steps taken during data collection and analysis, significantly contributed to the reliability of this study. This transparency enabled the study to be replicable, allowing other researchers to follow the same methods and potentially arrive at similar findings. These measures ensured that this study's findings were credible and reflected the actual experiences and insights of the

stakeholders involved in addressing CSA in the Maldives. The reliability of the qualitative data collected and analysed strengthened the conclusions drawn from this study.

3.10 Pilot Study

After ensuring the qualitative validity and reliability in early May 2023, this study conducted a pilot study in mid-May 2023. The pilot study examined the measures, challenges, and effective approaches employed by a government representative and an NGO representative. This initial phase aimed to gather preliminary insights and validate the interview questions before the study began collecting data. The primary purpose of conducting this pilot study was multifaceted. Firstly, it refined the interview questions, ensuring they were relevant, clear, and capable of eliciting meaningful responses in the actual setting. Feedback from participants enabled adjustments, thereby enhancing the validity of the data collection process. Secondly, the pilot study provided valuable experience and preparation for this study by immersing the study team in the actual data-collection setting. This hands-on involvement facilitated a deeper understanding of the dynamics at play and the context in which this study was situated.

Furthermore, the pilot study helped identify logistical challenges that might arise during the main study, such as recruitment challenges or communication barriers. By addressing these potential hurdles in advance, the preparatory phase helped ensure a smoother, more efficient data collection process. Ultimately, the insights gained from the pilot study informed the research design and fostered a greater awareness of the complexities surrounding CSA in the Maldives, which was essential for the subsequent phases of this study. This provided the study with a better understanding of the CSA measures, challenges, and effective approaches before exploring the data collection.

One of the primary outcomes of the pilot study was the refinement of the interview questions. Feedback from government and NGO representatives indicated that parts of the question were ambiguous for some respondents or not sufficiently deep for others. This led to changes to ensure the questions were pertinent and elicited deeper responses. Therefore, the combined data-collection instrument was better aligned with the participants' environment after the study, increasing the likelihood of collecting rich qualitative data. Additionally, the pilot study aimed to identify potential practical issues that could impact the data collection in the main study. For example, it raised challenges

related to participant selection, such as reaching participants and obtaining consent, given the sensitive nature of the discussions. Anticipating these challenges led to early planning, including efforts to address communication barriers and undertake the selection process.

3.11 Data Collection

Data for this study were collected over four months, from August 2023 to November 2023. The primary method of gathering information was interviews, which were deemed the most suitable for identifying and exploring key issues related to CSA in the Maldives. This qualitative method enabled in-depth discussions. This allows participants to share their experiences, perspectives, and insights regarding the measures they, as representatives of government and NGOs, employed to address CSA. In other words, the qualitative data collected through interviews provided deep insights into the actions of the government and NGOs. It positions this study to make a meaningful contribution to child welfare and protection in the Maldives.

Interviews were structured to create a comfortable environment for participants, encouraging them to speak openly about the measures, challenges, and effective approaches they had implemented to combat CSA. Each interview lasted less than 60 minutes, depending on the depth of the discussion and the participants' willingness to share information. Table 3.2 summarises the participant designations, the locations where data were collected, the specific interview dates, and the duration of each session in minutes. By providing this information, the table offers a clear overview of the breadth and scope of the data collection effort.

Including government and NGO representatives in the interviews was crucial to capturing a holistic view of CSA interventions in the Maldives. This diversity of perspectives enriched the data, ensuring that the study addressed the complexities of CSA from different organisational and operational angles. The eventual analysis of these interviews informed the identification of measures, challenges, and effective approaches. These aspects contribute valuable insights to the ongoing discourse on child protection in the region.

Table 3.3
Data Collection

Person	Designation	Data Collection Location	Data Collection Date (2023)/ Duration (Min)	Pseudonym (Used in Chapter 4)
1. Doctor	Doctor Gynaecologist (IGMH)	Residence	20 th Oct/ 12:09	GOV 1
2. Former Vice President of the Republic of Maldives	Vice President, July- November 2015/ Former Minister of Tourism	Vice President's Residence, Male.	08 th Oct/17:15	GOV 2
3. Former President of the Republic of Maldives/ President of the People's Majlis	President 2008 - February 2012	Presidents' Residence, Male'	24 th Oct/ 07:49	GOV 3
4. State Minister of the Ministry of Home Affairs/ Former Minister's Secretary	State Minister of the Ministry of Home Affairs	Residence	09 th Oct/ 42:25	GOV 4
5. Attorney General's Office	Former Attorney/ Lawyer	Agency	26 th Oct/ 07:29	GOV 5
6. Prosecutor General's Office	Lawyer	Prosecutor General's Office	15 th Oct/19:13	GOV 6
7. Gdh. Island	Chief head	Residence	23 rd Oct/26:11	GOV 7

8. Prosecutor General's Office	Prosecutor General	Prosecutor General's Office	1 st Nov/11:02	GOV 8
9. Former Parliament Member		Agency	22 nd Oct/11:25	GOV 9
10. Former Vice President of the Republic of Maldives/ Former Minister of Justice/ Former Minister of Aviation and Communication/ Former Minister of Home Affairs	Vice President, Nov 2013- July 2015/ Minister of Justice, 2005-2007 Former Minister of Aviation and Communication, 2008-2009 Former Minister of Home Affairs 2012-2013	Agency	22 nd Oct/30:13	GOV 10
11. Maldives National University	Lecturer	Maldives National University	1 st Nov/ 29:29	GOV 11
12. Parliament Member	Since 2009 to Date	Agency	10 th Oct/18:29	GOV 12
13. Maldives Police Service	Sub Inspector	FCPD	2 nd Nov/18:38	GOV 13
14. Police Integrity Commission/ Former Senior Investigation Officer HRCM	Vice President of the National Integrity Commission for the past 3 years/ Previously worked at HRCM for 12 years as a Senior Investigation Officer	Maldives Police Integrity Commission	22 nd Nov/ 10:35	GOV 14
15. Family Protection Authority	FPAHead	IGMH	23 rd Oct/ 20:43	GOV 15

16. Children's Ombudsperson's Office	Children Ombudsperson	Children Ombudspersons Office	18 th Oct/19:40	GOV 16
17. Supreme Court	Judge	Supreme Court	25 th Oct/19:31	GOV 17
18. Maldives Police Service	Former Commissioner	Agency	17 th Oct/34:24	GOV 18
19. Children's Ombudspersons Office	Director	Children Ombudspersons Office	25 th Oct/ 31:23	GOV 19
20. Advocating the Rights of Children	Chairperson	Cafe	25 th Oct/ 50:27	NGO 20
21. Prosecutor General's Office	Former PG	Agency	28 th Oct/ 21:49	GOV 21
22. Former Minister of Education/ Former Mayor of the capital city of the Maldives	Education Minister from February 2010 to February 2012, Mayor from 2017 to 2021	Minister's Residence. Male'	30 th Oct/ 30:27	GOV 22
23. Ministry of Gender, Social Security	Former Gender Minister from	Agency	29 th Oct/35:43	GOV 23
24. Children's Ombudspersons Office	Investigation Officer/ Lawyer	Children's Ombudspersons Office	18 th Oct/24:04	GOV 24
25. Hope for Women	Chairperson/ Former Monitoring Officer at HRCM	Agency	12 th Oct/ 24:23	NGO 25
26. Attorney General's Office	Former Attorney/ Lawyer	Agency	29 th Oct/ 36:10	GOV 26
27. HRCM	Former Commissioner of FIRCM	MNU	23 rd Nov/45:25	GOV 27
28. Child and Family Protection Services	Child Protection Coordinator	Ministry of Gender	23 rd Oct/ 14:24	GOV 28

29. Parliament Member		Parliament	25 th Oct/17:41	GOV 29
30. N. Island	Chief Head	Agency	16 th Oct/17:00	GOV 30
31. Criminal Court	Judge	Cafe	2 nd Nov/40:51	GOV 31
32. Maldives Police Service	DCP	Maldives Police Service	1 st Nov/25:30	GOV 32
33. UNICEF	Child Protection Specialist	UNICEF	6 th Nov/27:44	NGO 33
34. Ministry Of Education	Official	Ministry of Education	7 th Nov/29:48	GOV 34
35. Supreme Court	Judge	SC	21 st Nov/ 24:30	GOV 35
36. Iskhandhar School	Leading Teacher	School	31 st Oct/ 41:07	GOV 36

3.12 Data Analysis

The data analysis of this study is presented in this section. Data analysis is the reorganisation and interpretation of collected data (Mack et al., 2011). Data analysis was consistent with the study's primary focus: investigating the challenges faced by both government and non-governmental organisations in responding to CSA matters in the Maldives. Thematic analysis was used to analyse the data in this study. Thematic analysis is a widely used qualitative research approach that involves identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns or themes in the data (Maguire & Delahunt, 2017). This seemed an appropriate approach for analysing data collected through interviews and enabled this study to explore multiple aspects of participants' experiences and CSA.

A systematic approach was used in the analysis, comprising five steps. These steps include the familiarisation with the data, generation of initial codes, identification of themes, review of themes, and definition and naming of themes. This allowed the study to be confident that the findings stemmed from the data itself and captured the complexities of the issues organisations face in combating CSA. Qualitative data coding and analysis were carried out using NVivo version 12. Such software aided data organisation and reduced manual tasks. It also facilitated coding and theme identification, enabling an efficient, organised analysis. This study aimed to interpret the findings and derive meaningful insights using NVivo's capabilities. This eventually contributed to understanding the challenges associated with addressing child sexual abuse in the Maldives.

3.13 Ethical Concerns

Ethical considerations are paramount in this study, which explores the measures, challenges, and effective approaches employed by the government and NGOs to address CSA in the Maldives. The purpose of these ethical concerns is to ensure participants' welfare throughout the research process. Given the sensitive nature of the topic, particularly involving vulnerable abuse involving children, this study must take extra precautions to maintain ethical integrity. The first ethical concern was addressed in the first three chapters of this study for evaluation by the UiTM Research Ethics Committee (REC). This study, aligned with the objectives of REC, aims to safeguard the rights, safety, and well-being of human research participants, provide a timely, comprehensive, and independent review of the ethics of proposed studies, and ensure that the research

complies with existing laws and regulations. It can be said that this study was also compiled with these objectives upon the issuance of the approval letter on 7 June 2023 - REC/06/2023 (PG/MR/190), as shown in Appendix 1.

The second ethical concern is informed consent. It is crucial that all participants, including representatives from government and NGOs, clearly understand the research purpose, procedures, and potential risks before voluntarily agreeing to participate. This transparency helps build trust and encourages participants to contribute to this study. The third ethical concern is confidentiality. Given the sensitive nature of the information discussed with the government and NGOs, this study discloses only related information in the findings chapter. These include measures, challenges, and effective approaches they employ that align with this study's research objectives and questions. This study did not explore any other sensitive information disclosed by the government or NGOs during data collection to prevent potential breaches of privacy and confidentiality. Appendix 4 presents the Participant Information Sheet, and Appendices 5-40 contain the informed consent forms for all participants.

The fourth ethical concern is beneficence, which emphasises the need for the research to contribute positively to society. By investigating and highlighting measures, challenges, and effective approaches to addressing CSA, this study aims to contribute to the body of knowledge and benefit the broader community. The fifth ethical concern is reciprocity. This study considers how it could provide value to the participants involved. This study shares its findings with the government and NGOs to enhance their strategies and practices and foster collaboration.

3.14 Summary

This chapter has presented the overall methodological foundation of this study on child sexual abuse in the Maldives. It introduces the research philosophy, design, data sampling methods, and the inclusion criteria employed. Together, they form a robust framework for collecting and analysing data. Articulating research questions and designing a detailed interview protocol are crucial to ensuring participants provide informed and thoughtful answers. Taken together, such a methodological approach is well suited to meeting this study's objectives and to providing a deeper understanding of the multifaceted nature of CSA in the Maldives. The results obtained using the approach introduced in this chapter are examined in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

4.1 Introduction

This chapter comprehensively analyses the findings related to this study's three research objectives concerning CSA in the Maldives. As this critical issue unfolds in a rapidly evolving societal context, understanding existing measures, identifying pressing challenges, and exploring effective approaches are essential to safeguard vulnerable children. The first research objective focuses on the existing measures to address CSA in the Maldives. This analysis provides insight into the current landscape of child protection efforts.

The second research objective examines the challenges of combating CSA. This examination highlights the importance of addressing these challenges to enhance the overall effectiveness of child protection initiatives. The third research objective focuses on effective approaches to addressing CSA in the Maldives. This section highlights strategies that have demonstrated success in prevention and recovery. Identifying these effective approaches is vital for informing future policies and practices, ensuring that child protection measures not only exist but are also efficient and responsive. Together, these findings create a comprehensive picture of the current state of CSA protection in the Maldives, laying the groundwork for informed discussions and recommendations in Chapter 5.

To ensure the validity of the insights, feedback from government and NGO representatives has been thoroughly vetted and collaboratively refined. These provide robust data that align with the research objectives. The focus is not on comparing the two entities' impacts, but on understanding their contributions to addressing CSA.

4.2 Organisational Profiles of the Participants

As discussed in Chapter 3, the sample for this study comprises 36 participants, including both government and NGO representatives. This section provides brief organisational profiles of these participants.

4.2.1 Government Organisations

Sixteen government organisations are participating in this study. Their details are as follows.

4.2.1.1 President's Office (Former President, Former Vice President)

The President's Office is the highest executive authority governing the nation and implementing public policies. This office is responsible for setting the country's strategic direction and advising on other government functions, including social justice and economic development initiatives. A critical area of focus is the protection of human rights, with particular emphasis on children's rights. Additionally, with guidance from current and former presidents and vice presidents, the office facilitates consistent policymaking, ensuring a more reliable system of governance. Comprehensive child protection policies are implemented by coordinating with relevant ministries and departments through the President's Office. It works with international bodies to address problems affecting children's well-being by supporting legislative reforms and public awareness initiatives. By adopting and implementing a whole-of-government approach that emphasises child protection, the President's Office is doing its part to ensure a safer environment for every citizen, including the most vulnerable.

4.2.1.2 Ministry of Gender, Family and Social Services (Now known as Ministry of Social and Family Development)

The Ministry of Gender, Family, and Social Services works to promote gender equality and enhance the quality of life for families in the Maldives. Its core mission is to develop policies that promote women's rights, assist distressed families, and provide support services to vulnerable individuals. The Ministry tackles key social challenges, including domestic violence, child protection, and mental health, to provide a supportive environment in which all people feel safe and valued. The Ministry provides stakeholders, including the NGO rings and other community organisations, with the skills to empower citizens to engage in their communities. Such endeavours typically encompass awareness-raising on gender equality and family welfare. Through inclusive policies that address societal challenges, the ministry aims to build a more just and

equitable society by prioritising the rights of women and children in national development efforts.

4.2.1.3 Maldives Police Services

The principal law enforcement agency in the Maldives is the Maldives Police Service, which is responsible for maintaining public order and preventing crime nationwide. Involving the public in policing and addressing citizens' concerns will increase their trust in law enforcement. One area of focus is their investigation of child abuse cases so that vulnerable individuals are protected, and justice is done. The Maldives Police Service also has specialised units for child protection, domestic violence, and gender-based crimes. It further enhances its effectiveness in implementing training programs and awareness campaigns through collaboration with governmental and non-governmental organisations. The police service plans to train officers to handle sensitive cases, enabling them to respond effectively to child safety issues. It alleviates their immediate concerns and helps the community be safer and more secure in the long run.

4.2.1.4 Ministry of Education

The Ministry of Education focuses on all aspects of education in the Maldives, including ensuring that all children have access to quality education. By developing curricula and implementing education policies, they will continue to ensure inclusive and equitable educational opportunities. Being aware that education plays a fundamental role in empowering children to respond to violence, the ministry reaffirms that a safe, healthy learning environment encourages quality education, and in return, it prevents abuse. The Ministry of Education is also integrating safety awareness programs into the school curricula to help students learn about their rights and how to seek assistance when necessary. Educational initiatives, especially those in partnership with NGOs and child protection agencies, can significantly improve children's well-being in conflict settings. This comprehensive strategy reflects the ministry's commitment to providing more than just instructional content. It fosters emotional well-being and social development, enabling children to flourish academically and in personally secure environments.

4.2.1.5 Parliament

Parliament of the Maldives. The Parliament comprises elected representatives tasked with developing legislation related to child protection, gender equality, and social justice. By engaging in in-depth debates and deliberations, members address pressing social issues and ensure that citizens, particularly those from vulnerable social groups, have a voice in the legislative process. Parliament exercises oversight, scrutinising the implementation and consequences of laws that affect children and families. Parliament aims to enhance child protection legislation in collaboration with governmental and non-governmental partners. Through this meaningful interaction, states and societal systems are held accountable to one another and the global community, legitimising standards for the protection of children.

4.2.1.6 Supreme Court

The Supreme Court of the Maldives is the country's highest and final court of appeal, responsible for interpreting the law and protecting citizens' rights. Its mandate consists of handling child abuse and exploitation cases, ensuring that justice is upheld in the procedure. The court's decisions establish important legal precedents that influence the application of child protection and family welfare laws throughout the Maldives. Additionally, the Supreme Court promotes legal awareness and easier access to justice, providing citizens with knowledge of their rights, particularly in matters involving minors. The court promotes a just judicial system and ensures that legal proceedings are conducted in the best interests of children. By affirmatively upholding constitutional rights, the Supreme Court protects vulnerable populations. Thereby laying a foundation for a safe and just environment in which children can grow.

4.2.1.7 Criminal Court

The Criminal Court of the Maldives is a general trial court that hears criminal cases, including those involving child abuse and exploitation. In the interest of law and order, the court ensures that offenders are held responsible for their actions. Justice is served, upholding the law and protecting the community's interests. Based on a model that centres on victims' rights, the Criminal Court comprises specialised judges who handle sensitive cases involving minors. Aside from courtroom proceedings, the

Criminal Court focuses on a child-friendly environment throughout hearings as part of its mission to mitigate the trauma endured by young victims. Victims receive legal representation and support services. It reinforces the importance of community and helps increase successful outcomes in a process that can be intimidating and confusing, particularly for young people.

4.2.1.8 Atoll Council

In the Maldives, local governance is exercised through the Atoll Council, which addresses local problems and devises mechanisms to enforce national policies. As a mediator between the government and the public, the council addresses environmental and social issues, with a particular focus on the needs of children and young people. Engagement through the councils fosters a sense of togetherness and ownership, enabling community members to be involved in developing and making decisions. For Child Protection, Atoll Council works with the government and the NGO network to create programs for the prevention of child abuse and family welfare services. The council believes that, through community engagement, an environment where children thrive can be cultivated, recognising that it takes a village to protect those with fewer means to protect themselves and to make our community a better place to live.

4.2.1.9 Prosecutor General's Office

The Prosecutor General's Office supervises the prosecution of criminal cases in the Maldives, including those on child abuse and exploitation. This unit promotes justice for such offenders by ensuring efficient trials and enforcement. A vital connection between law enforcement agencies and the judiciary, the office focuses on preparing and presenting cases in court to achieve positive outcomes for the victims. In addition to its prosecutorial functions, the Prosecutor General's Office promotes legislative initiatives to strengthen protections for children and victims of abuse. The office aims to enhance the handling of sensitive cases by training and guiding legal professionals. It works in a legal environment that protects children's rights, helping create a safer society.

4.2.1.10 Attorney General's Office

The Attorney General's Office serves as the chief legal advisor to the Maldivian government, guiding on legislative and public law matters. A vital responsibility of this office has been drafting legal instruments to ensure the highest level of protection for vulnerable groups, such as children. Through this approach, the Attorney General's Office aims to protect citizens' rights and promote social justice in the Maldives by aligning local laws with international human rights standards. The Attorney General's Office also participates in the legislative process by advocating for changes to the law that strengthen systems designed to protect children. The office collaborates with various stakeholders and promotes legal literacy to empower citizens to understand and defend their rights. This holistic approach reinforces the legal arsenal to protect children from abuse, ensuring a fair and just society.

4.2.1.11 Indira Gandhi Memorial Hospital

Indira Gandhi Memorial Hospital (IGMH) is a vital healthcare provider in the Maldives, offering a wide range of medical services with a focus on pediatric care. IGMH, the primary public hospital in the capital, provides medical services to children with a range of health problems. Specialising in treating both physical and mental health conditions, the hospital is designed to prioritise the well-being of young patients in a space that promotes healing and recovery. This includes the partnership with multiple government and non-government organisations for respective health-related issues due to abuse and neglect within child protection. The hospital plays a vital role in protecting children by identifying victims and providing medical care. As an organisation, IGMH plays a crucial role in supporting children's health and safety in the Maldives. Thereby improving their overall quality of life and well-being through extensive support services.

4.2.1.12 Police Integrity Commission

The Police Integrity Commission (PIC) is an independent body established to promote accountability and transparency within the Maldives Police Service. Its primary role is to help ensure the principles of justice and integrity by investigating complaints against law enforcement officers. The commission also plays a vital role in

fostering public trust in law enforcement by providing oversight. These ensure that communities can trust the police to act reasonably and responsibly. The Police Integrity Commission has oversight over police responses to child abuse incidents within the domain of child protection, working towards best practices in policing and treatment of victims. Acting this way would go a long way toward protecting children, and the commission achieves this by demanding ethical behaviour from officers. The police should be more effective so that children receive care or justice when they are victimised through their oversight functions and their engagement in the community.

4.2.1.13 Maldives National University

Develop, advance, and strengthen higher education in the Maldives. The Maldives National University (MNU) is the leading higher education institution in the Maldives, offering advanced coursework delivered by a team of scholars who inspire the next generation of Maldivian students through quality education. MNU has been educating highly qualified professionals across industries such as healthcare, the legal profession, and social services. At the same time, the university emphasises the need to prepare graduates to address pressing social issues, such as child welfare. MNU partners with governmental and non-governmental organisations through research initiatives that address social issues such as child abuse and family dynamics. This collaboration aims to provide valuable insights that help shape evidence-based policy development and advocacy. MNU offers extensive education and research activities, significantly enhancing its community's capability and capacity to protect and nurture future generations.

4.2.1.14 Family Protection Authority

The Family Protection Authority (FPA) is dedicated to preventing domestic violence and enhancing the well-being of families in the Maldives. The agency is committed to designing policies and programs that help families experiencing violence, particularly women and children. The FPA envisions a world where every family has access to basic resources and support services necessary for building and sustaining a safe environment that is free from abuse and neglect. The authority also works to increase community awareness of family welfare, particularly child protection. The

FPA conducts training sessions and outreach programs to equip individuals and communities with the knowledge to recognise signs of abuse and seek help. The Family Protection Authority plays a crucial role in making children safer and strengthening families. This ultimately leads to more resilient communities by promoting a culture of support and fostering a sense of safety.

4.2.1.15 Child and Family Protection Services

The Child and Family Protection Service (CFPS) of the Maldives is committed to safeguarding, nurturing, and promoting the well-being of children and families throughout the country. These services are minor in the context of identifying and intervening in abuse or neglect to signpost people who require assistance. The agency provides safe spaces for children to grow and develop through child rights-based practices. These services are offered in various forms, including emotional support, legal guidance, and connecting with local resources and services. Working in conjunction with government entities and NGOs, the Child and Family Protection Services seeks to develop systemic strategies to combat child abuse and bolster family resilience. The collaboration is essential to building community responses to child protection issues. Thus, promote a culture of shared responsibility for our children's well-being and provide families with the support they need.

4.2.1.16 Children's Ombudspersons Office

The Children's Ombudsperson's Office was established as an autonomous institution to promote and protect the rights and best interests of all children in the Maldives. This office is responsible for implementing laws and policies that protect children's rights. This ensures that their voices are taken into account when decisions are made regarding their welfare and well-being. Through raising awareness and helping to resolve problems, the ombudsperson plays a crucial role in protecting vulnerable children from abuse and exploitation. The role of the Children's Ombudsperson's Office is to align child protection systems and interventions to protect all young people, in cooperation with diverse stakeholders. These include government agencies, politicians, and NGOs. By doing so, it assumes an active role in upholding a culture of respect for children's rights. This, in turn, promotes legal advocacy and strives

for a society where children are not only protected but also empowered to develop their full potential.

4.2.2 Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO)

Three NGOs are participating in this study. Their details are as follows.

4.2.2.1 UNICEF

The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) is a leading humanitarian organisation dedicated to promoting and protecting the rights of every child worldwide. Operating in over 190 countries, UNICEF works to ensure that vulnerable children and their families have access to essential healthcare, education, and nutrition services. In the Maldives, UNICEF's core mandates focus on protecting children's rights, promoting their well-being, and addressing the needs of vulnerable children. The organisation prioritises gender equality and key areas, including health and nutrition, education, and child protection, specifically concerning child abuse and disability. Through the development of targeted programs, UNICEF aims to raise awareness and advocate for policies that safeguard children's rights, collaborating with government agencies and local organisations. Moreover, UNICEF conducts research to support evidence-based policy development, ensuring that the distinct needs of children in the Maldives are met. The organisation also emphasises addressing climate change and mental health needs, as well as utilising communications for development (C4D) to foster sustainable social change. By strengthening systems for identifying and supporting vulnerable children, UNICEF plays a vital role in promoting a healthier, safer, and fairer society in the Maldives, both now and in the future.

4.2.2.2 Advocating the Rights of Children (ARC)

Advocating the Rights of Children (ARC) Maldives is a commitment to children's rights in the Maldives. Their programs are designed to address some of the challenges children face and are often ineffective without access to education, healthcare, and a safe environment. The organisation collaborates closely with governments, local communities, and international partners to enhance child protection policies and raise awareness of children's rights. Its efforts range from workshops,

campaigns, and advocacy projects to help children influence decisions that affect their lives. By promoting partnerships among actors, ARC aspires to build a society where children's rights are valued and upheld and their growth and welfare are guaranteed. ARC works to create a better tomorrow for the children of the Maldives.

4.2.2.3 Hope for Women

Hope for Women (HFW) is a dedicated NGO in the Maldives committed to supporting the needs and rights of women and children. The organisation focuses on addressing crucial issues such as domestic violence, mental health, and gender discrimination. By providing safe spaces and essential support services, HFW plays a significant role in enhancing the resilience and well-being of marginalised individuals, serving as a critical component of community support in the region. HFW strives to raise awareness and challenge the social norms and practices that underpin gender-based violence (GBV) through targeted advocacy campaigns. Collaborating with local and international partners, the organisation designs programs that deliver immediate assistance and foster long-term systemic transformations in attitudes toward women's rights. By promoting women's empowerment, HFW helps create a safer environment for women and children in the Maldives. This ultimately improves the quality of life for the country's women.

To achieve its mission, HFW has established several key objectives. Firstly, the organisation is dedicated to eliminating all forms of violence against women and girls in the Maldives. Besides, they are actively working to protect and promote women's rights in line with moderate and liberal interpretations of Islam. Furthermore, HFW aims to enhance women's self-reliance and empowerment through policy dialogue with key stakeholders. In addition, HFW supports the efforts of civil society organisations and state institutions that advocate for gender equality and equity. The organisation encourages youth participation in protecting and promoting women's human rights, ensuring that future generations actively engage in these crucial issues. HFW also emphasises the importance of fulfilling the commitments enshrined in international and regional conventions concerning women's rights. This holds state authorities accountable for their obligations. Lastly, HFW is committed to providing its services unconditionally, ensuring no support is tied to incentives or disincentives. Through these objectives, HFW endeavours to create a more equitable and just society for

women and children in the Maldives. This ultimately strives to foster an environment where their rights are respected and upheld.

4.3 Existing Measures to Address Child Sexual Abuse (CSA) in the Maldives (Research Objective 1)

The Maldives has launched targeted actions against CSA in recent years, as it identifies this problem as both a fundamental violation of children's rights and a threat to societal stability. Successful solutions to this multifaceted problem require integration between legal action and educational and community-based measures. This aims to both prevent abuse and provide support to victims. Existing protective measures have been implemented to build an inclusive framework that safeguards children and ensures their welfare. This chapter examines the tactical approaches employed by Maldivian government bodies, NGOs, and community stakeholders to counter incidents of CSA.

Key initiatives include implementing standardised guidelines and procedures, robustly enforcing laws, and legislative changes to strengthen protections for children. The focus on public involvement and community engagement also underscores the importance of fostering collective responsibility for safeguarding children. Other vital measures, such as developing child protection facilities, monitoring and evaluating implemented policies, and addressing gaps in legal frameworks, contribute to a holistic approach. This section analyses current measures to highlight the steps taken to address CSA in the Maldives and identifies areas that require further development. The thorough assessment demonstrates a strong commitment to ensuring safe conditions for every child and protecting their recognised rights. Table 4.1 and Figure 4.1 summarise the key themes and subthemes.

Table 4.1
Existing Measures to Address Child Sexual Abuse (CSA) in the Maldives: Key Themes, Subthemes, and Number of Responses (Major to Minor)

No.	Subtheme	Number of Responses
Existing Measures to Address Child Sexual Abuse (CSA) in the Maldives		36 (Total)
1	Enforcement of laws and policies	8
2	Implementation of guidelines and procedures	4
3	Awareness and education initiatives	3
4	Implementation of the Child Protection Act	3
5	Continuous review and improvement of laws	3
6	Legislative changes	2
7	Public involvement and community engagement	2
8	Monitoring and evaluation of implementation	2
9	Addressing legal gaps and challenges	2
10	Establishment of institutions under the Child Rights Protection Act (Act No. 19/2019)	2
11	Addressing delays in legal processes	2
12	Creation of internal protocols	
13	Addressing workforce and resource gaps	1
14	Development of child protection facilities	1

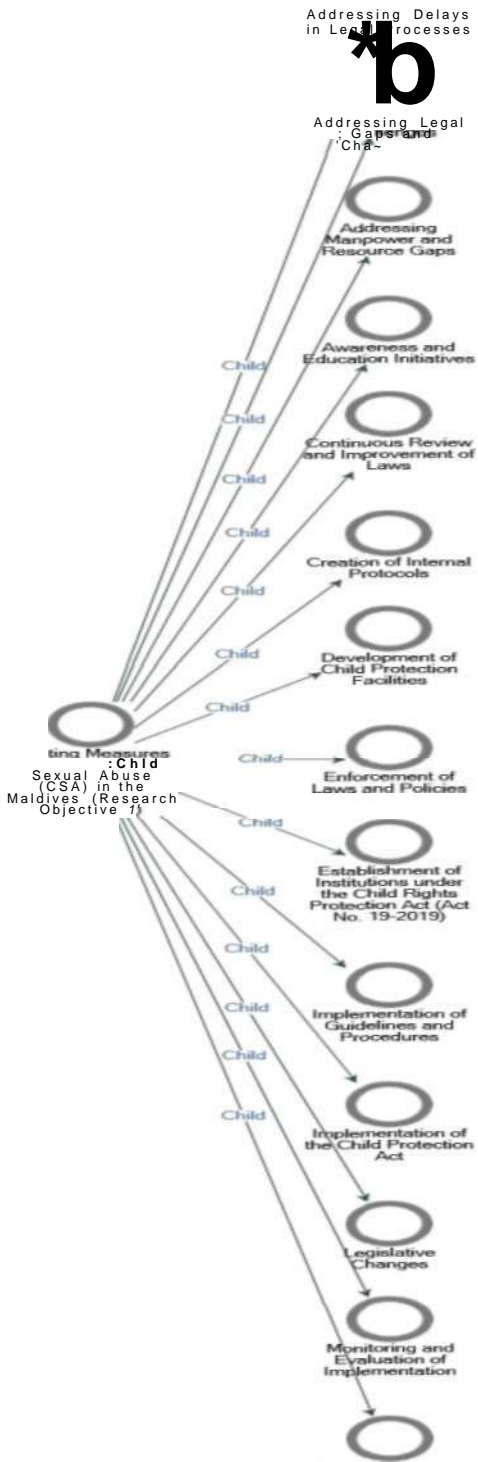


Figure 4.1 Existing Measures to Address Child Sexual Abuse (CSA) in the Maldives: Key Themes and Subthemes (Default Order by NVivo Software)

4.3.1 Enforcement of Laws and Policies

The Maldives relies on enforced laws and protective policies to structure its primary approach to fighting CSA. The authorities have established multiple legal systems that protect potential perpetrators while also providing avenues for victim justice. The actual value of these protection laws depends directly on the agencies that enforce them, which must consistently and diligently apply the procedures. The personnel receive organised training sessions, which enable them to master the complexities of child protection law through regular workshops. The teaching method prepares law enforcement officials to handle child abuse cases by giving them both legal knowledge and vital sensitivity skills for victim support.

Strong legal systems exist, yet numerous obstacles hinder their effective enforcement. Existing law applications are difficult to enforce because enforcement personnel face resource limitations, inadequate training, and varying levels of dedication. Although protective child-safety laws exist on paper, many stakeholders worry that these regulations do not work effectively in real-world situations involving children. Authors of enforcement strategies must develop a multifaceted solution that incorporates community participation, enabling residents to actively monitor and promote child protection. An inclusive community that shares responsibility for detecting and reporting abuse improves the application of current laws. The participants stated that:

"Actions are taken as per laws and policies" (GOV 1)

"Specific laws and regulations are made or changed after an unfortunate incident arises with much anger and strong emotions. Laws and regulations are there. " (GOV2)

"The law splay a huge role in preventing such crimes, and at the same time, the enforcement agencies play a significant role [...] The enforcement agencies play a significant role as laws do not enforce themselves." (GOV 4)

"The law and act itself is perfect and functional. " (GOV 6)

"The laws, regulations, and standards have been put in place [...]" (GOV 14)

"When we look at the decisions of the judicial courts, we see that there is a fairly heavy punishment if the crime is proven. " (GOV 17)

There are laws and regulations [...]" (GOV 19)

"Having said that, there are some excellent points in the laws as well." (GO V 24)

Child protection initiatives in the Maldives succeed only by vigorously enforcing existing laws and policies. Child protection laws, which both prevent sexual abuse and seek justice for victims, require strict enforcement by law enforcement groups to function effectively. Agencies must maintain ongoing training and a strong commitment to transforming legal standards into practical measures that protect children. Community involvement must become central to child protection strategies to overcome enforcement difficulties, such as limited resources and inconsistent obligations. This can be achieved through enhanced monitoring, driven by public awareness and involvement, thereby supporting enforcement and fostering vigilance and accountability. The Maldives needs to continually improve its law enforcement procedures before establishing a justice system that can effectively protect vulnerable members of its community. According to this strategy, Legal enforcement is essential to achieving effective child protection outcomes.

4.3.2 Implementation of Guidelines and Procedures

For the Maldives to transform its child protection laws into effective systems understood by all stakeholders, it needs clear procedures and guidelines for implementation. Governmental bodies, together with NGOs, joined forces to create distinct protocols for handling child abuse situations. These protocols outline the procedures that each participating entity, including police organisations, social service agencies, and educational institutions, must follow to ensure effective detection, response, and reporting of abuse. Organisations run periodic training events that teach employees to know their protocol duties to maintain child protection standards. With this structured approach, responsibility among all involved parties grows, and the public gains trust in a dependable system for managing sensitive matters.

When protocols exist only as written rules and lack real-world application, they fail to serve their intended purpose. Deficiencies in training programmes create uncertainty about appropriate actions when reporting abuse. A successful approach to overcoming current obstacles requires establishing rigorous monitoring and evaluation frameworks to track implementation fidelity to the guidelines. These processes provide

managers with a regular evaluation system to track compliance with procedures and identify areas needing system enhancements. Practitioners who engage in direct practice deliver continuous feedback, enabling adaptations to guidelines to address Maldives-specific challenges more effectively. The participant stated that:

"A set procedure and guideline for providing a safe place for children from their abusers has been emphasised. These guidelines must not be just on paper but effectively implemented" (GOV 1)

"To carry out our work and to ensure proper implementation of laws, we have our internal protocols in place. For example, if the High Court or Supreme Court makes a rule, we have mechanisms in place to inform people about it." (GOV 8)

"You know, one of the ways we started to attend to this issue is that we thought that by bringing, you know, certain legislation, we would be able to address it. Legislation is one requirement. It must be there, even though when we did not have this special legislation in place, we did have it within, you know, the penal code and related regulations. For example, the regulations of the conduct of trials have particular provisions. " (GOV 10)

"It is not that there are no laws and regulations, ok. There are laws, regulations, standards, and procedures established regarding them. I will not say that all of it is perfect and effective, but for now, to help stop this issue, it is enough. " (GOV29)

The proper implementation of protocols and guidelines ensures the core child protection methods are maintained throughout the Maldives. Organisations that implement clear procedures together with continuous education build an integrated system for child abuse prevention. Ongoing stakeholder feedback creates opportunities for essential changes, enabling child protection guidelines to adapt to current problems and emerging challenges. Only through steady maintenance and improvement of protective protocols can organisations instil a sense of responsibility and alertness, leading to better child safety and well-being outcomes. When stakeholders work together, these protective strategies become more effective. This allows child protection measures to effectively defend children and enable them to reach out for help.

4.3.3 Awareness and Education Initiatives

Awareness and education programmes are fundamental to the Maldives' efforts to combat CSA. They provide critical information about abuse signals to broad audiences and instruct them on how to report appropriately. The educational programmes target family members, educators, and community groups by sharing vital

information on abuse detection methods and reporting resources. Research demonstrates that school-based educational programs are highly effective tools that provide students with knowledge of personal safety and rights, as well as essential skills for identifying inappropriate behaviour in others. The educational methods that protect children's ability to express themselves contribute significantly to both recognising and stopping abuse at earlier stages.

Although essential steps have been taken, targeted education remains a crucial means of disseminating information effectively across diverse societal groups. Ongoing evaluation of awareness campaigns enables organisations to detect gaps and develop improvement strategies. Educational programmes become more effective when they are customised for specific audience groups. Comprehensive training investments targeting educators, community leaders, and parents ensure that each critical participant in child protection remains informed and ready. This approach leads to an informed civic population that can effectively advocate for the protection and rights of children. The participants stated that:

"There is a recognised need for improved awareness and education regarding child protection laws [...] Lack of awareness and education." (GOV 18)

"Efforts are being made to educate stakeholders on laws and regulations, ensuring that knowledge leads to proper actions" (GOV 19)

"But recently we have seen that the government has been placing this issue as apriority. " (GOV33)

In summary, the Maldives faces CSA, which requires effective approaches; education and awareness strategies are crucial. These initiatives enhance child protection by teaching parents, teachers, and community members to recognise abuse and to use available reporting tools through their educational programs. Students learn to identify their rights through school-based curriculum, while also recognising inappropriate conduct. This enables them to know when and how to seek help. This educational effort requires ongoing operation because consistent evaluation and adaptability ensure that the information maintains its value and effectiveness. Programmes designed around specific demographic requirements enhance both user comprehension and engagement. Communities build environments through united educational initiatives between community members directed at improving education effectiveness, where they effectively identify and stop child abuse cases. Developing

awareness and prompt-response protocols will significantly improve protection measures for children across the Maldives.

4.3.4 Implementation of the Child Protection Act

The Child Protection Act is the core strategy of the Maldives' national protection efforts to safeguard children and uphold their fundamental rights. The comprehensive legislation assigns duties to government bodies, law enforcement, and social service providers to build a complete child protection system. A successful application requires clear communication of responsibilities among all parties, skills training, and the distribution of resource information. The coordinated response to child protection must prioritise children's well-being when establishing protective measures.

This legislation needs to exist and be subject to ongoing scrutiny through monitoring and thorough evaluation of its practical implementation to succeed. Community participation generates essential information by showing how people live with the act in their everyday lives. Through public discussions about the act's enforcement, authorities establish trust and learn how the law immediately affects children. Establishing transparent communication pathways among legislators, enforcement personnel, and community representatives allows the Maldives to build a flexible protective system for children. The participant stated that:

"Actions are taken as per laws. " (GOV 1)

"The law plays a huge role in preventing such crimes... " (GOV 4)

"Procedures have been followed under the Child Protection Act, with monitoring bodies established to improve the situation" (GOV 16)

In summary, establishing the Child Protection Act provides fundamental protection for children's rights throughout the Maldives. The detailed specifications for stakeholder duties in this legislation establish an organised system that provides the foundation for effective child protection operations. An essential component for developing unified solutions to prevent abuse and neglect requires every participant to be fully educated about their duties. Continuous evaluations and monitoring applications will determine the long-term success of the Child Protection Act. People will reveal hidden weaknesses through community engagement, allowing us to improve the law's performance. Public involvement in act-based dialogues fosters solidarity in

upholding responsible governance, strengthening communal determination to protect and maintain child welfare. The Maldives has the opportunity to develop an evolving legal system that defends children and supports their self-sufficient expression of needs and rights.

4.3.5 Continuous Review and Improvement of Laws

Child protection issues in the Maldives require continuous legislative refinement, as review and improvement actions are crucial. Error assessments of current legislation help lawmakers pinpoint sections that need progressive changes and ensure laws remain applicable in the face of modern challenges. Engaging multiple stakeholders, such as legal experts, child advocacy organisations, and community members, in the legislative review process fosters a collaborative approach to law-making. Amendments receive input from affected individuals, thereby creating legal structures better equipped to protect children's rights.

Mechanisms for continuous public feedback show great promise for improving legislative responsiveness. The public highlights practical operational issues with laws while guiding essential legal reforms to enhance their efficiency. This participatory approach serves the dual purpose of strengthening governmental accountability and fostering trust between the government and its people. Thereby, strengthening legal frameworks. A systematic evaluation process, alongside upgrades to child protection laws, enables the Maldives to better protect its youngest people against new dangers while respecting their rights. The participants stated that:

"There is a commitment to reviewing laws regularly to ensure they reflect societal changes and needs. As society changes, there would be changes to the laws and regulations. " (GOV 17)

"There needs to be a review made of the process whereby we can identify what steps can be let go. " (GOV 32)

"Acknowledgement that protocols and policies require improvement highlights the ongoing efforts for reform" (GOV 36)

In summary, addressing future challenges and social changes in the Maldives requires adequate protection for children, which necessitates ongoing evaluation and enhancement of existing protection laws. Regular assessments enable lawmakers and stakeholders to identify outdated or inoperative legislation, thereby making reform opportunities available promptly. The review procedure benefits from diverse

perspectives when legal specialists team up with child protection entities and community residents, resulting in a comprehensive approach to legislative reform. When public debates about current regulations occur, they build insights into child protection law responsibilities while promoting responsible citizen engagement. The lifelong safety of children will benefit from legal systems that can adapt to new emerging threats. A robust child protection system will evolve through consistent reviews of laws and their enhancements, showcasing the Maldives' commitment to ensuring that children grow safely and thrive.

4.3.6 Legislative Changes

The Maldives needs legislative changes as essential steps to respond to the evolving challenges in child protection. Government interventions aimed at modifying existing legal frameworks to provide stronger protections for children nationwide have recently been implemented. The legal reforms expand by updating current regulations while introducing new regulations that address modern patterns of abuse, including online exploitation. A multidimensional stakeholder consultation process, involving legal specialists and child-focused groups, is conducted during legislative revisions. This is to ensure child protection measures remain responsive to ongoing societal challenges affecting children. This comprehensive method creates legislation that goes beyond mere responsiveness to actively build a wide-ranging protective framework.

The effective enactment of the new laws depends entirely on their execution, combined with the dedication of enforcement authorities. Despite their robust appearance on paper, all legal reforms face ongoing implementation challenges across both government tiers and community groups. Community input and routine evaluations remain crucial for analysing the effects of enacted laws and identifying any deficiencies that emerge over time. Town hall meetings and community forums serve as valuable platforms for educating citizens about legal changes and ancillary legislative developments. This thereby generates widespread understanding and acceptance. The participatory approach yields stronger legislative support and more robust protection mechanisms for children. The participant stated that:

"Laws and regulations are periodically revised in response to unfortunate incidents, but implementation still faces challenges" (GOV 2)

*[...] there are strong, comprehensive, and strict laws and regulations."
(GOV 10)*

In conclusion, the Maldives must enact new legislation to effectively combat CSA. Active modification of laws, alongside adaptation to emerging types of abuse, demonstrates a dedication to child protection against continually evolving threats. If these legal changes are properly implemented and stakeholders receive adequate training on the new regulations, they will yield successful results. Enduring collaboration with community members, combined with specialised knowledge about child advocacy, fosters a legislative environment that effectively responds to societal demands and their multifaceted challenges. Maldivian society gains more protection for children when public legislative involvement creates citizen responsibility and accountability. The public system will better support child protection and enable every child to succeed within safe conditions through continuous legislative refinement and flexible adaptation.

4.3.7 Public Involvement and Community Engagement

Community and public participation are key elements of the approach to combating CSA across the Maldives. The public learns about indicators of abuse and reporting methods through multiple awareness campaigns and community-based programmes. Building community responsibility toward child safety requires active involvement from community leaders, educators, and parents. When these projects are carried out successfully, they create conditions in which community members feel empowered to act if they detect child endangerment. When community members expand their knowledge about child welfare issues, they demonstrate higher reporting rates of abuse. This results in faster provision of protective services to children.

Public engagement efforts require customisation to effectively reach and include underserved community groups and marginalised population segments. Organisations can address distinct cultural barriers that affect knowledge-building and safeguarding measures for child protection across various populations by designing specialised outreach initiatives. Working with local organisations helps expand outreach operations to build comprehensive support networks supporting child protection activities. Active public discussion and strong community connections create safer environments for

children when child welfare becomes the primary focus in the Maldives. The participant stated that:

"Initiatives are underway to enhance public and youth involvement in child protection efforts. The public needs to be involved, and so does the youth [...] The teenagers also need to contribute and support this work." (GOV 11)

"We are struggling with it from the beginning. There are special procedures for that, which we call diversion theory, restorative model, and introducing a rehabilitated individual into the community, which is the main concept." (GOV21)

In conclusion, winning public involvement and community participation is essential to building effective child protection systems throughout the Maldives. Strengthening educational initiatives and awareness campaigns through community empowerment is needed to challenge CSA. The involvement of parents, educators, and government officials fosters shared accountability and awareness of child protection, thereby maintaining high standards of child welfare. These campaigns must reach underserved groups and solve cultural obstacles to achieve their full impact. Customised outreach programs that operate without interruption create pathways between unique communities and the goals of the child protection system. Ultimately, the success of these community-driven efforts depends on collaboration and ongoing communication. Community involvement must be utilised to build protective measures around vulnerable children, so that the Maldives can move toward becoming a society where the safety of young citizens is a major societal priority.

4.3.8 Monitoring and Evaluation of Implementation

Monitoring and evaluation of the implementation of child protection measures are crucial for assessing their effectiveness and ensuring accountability. Rigorous assessment frameworks provide stakeholders with insights into the efficiency of current law and policy implementation activities. Establishing clear metrics and precise performance indicators enables stakeholders to assess the success of different initiatives and promptly recognise improvement needs. Child protection systems maintain public trust through accountability and transparency, which are fostered by consistent evaluations.

Multifaceted stakeholder involvement through government agencies, community organisations, and advocacy groups produces better evaluation outcomes of monitoring processes. Collaborative assessments reveal previously invisible problems while offering completely new perspectives. Stakeholders improve child protection outcomes by altering strategies through ongoing monitoring and analysis. The child protection strategies in the Maldives have become more effective at meeting children's needs and enhancing their safety by adapting to dynamic conditions. The participant stated that:

"For example, if something happens, there are procedures to be followed. Like, as per the Child Protection Act, a monitoring body, established rigorously, looks into improving the situation, attends to the cases, and tries to complete them quickly too." (GOV16)

"There is ongoing scrutiny of how laws function in practice, as issues of neglect and loopholes are identified" (GOV30)

In conclusion, stakeholders must evaluate the implementation of child protection measures; such monitoring determines their effectiveness and safeguards accountability. Stakeholders recognise effective initiatives and adjustments through consistent assessments, enabling them to prepare evidence-based decisions for upcoming activities. Defining precise performance standards and metrics establishes a system for accurately reviewing current strategies, making areas needing improvement apparent. Evaluation improves through stakeholder diversity, as government bodies, NGOs, and community organisations contribute multiple viewpoints and practical experience to the assessment process. Child protection systems that employ collaborative methods generate increased transparency and foster public trust. The process of constant supervision creates continuous developmental opportunities necessary to stay responsive to how child abuse and protection measures change over time. When the Maldives prioritises evaluative methods, it will establish a comprehensive child protection structure to safeguard children's fundamental rights and well-being. Regular monitoring fosters a culture of accountability, leading to improved outcomes for vulnerable children.

4.3.9 Addressing Legal Gaps and Challenges

The key protective measure to improve child safety in the Maldives is to eliminate and address existing legal issues. Legal measures must regularly adapt to remain effective against evolving threats and to respond to societal transformations. Authorities closely examine existing laws to identify gaps in protection, enabling legislative frameworks to better reinforce child protection measures. Through consultations with legal professionals, advocates, and community stakeholders, a more precise understanding of system weaknesses emerges, and each group unites around a shared purpose for effective reform.

The real-world outcomes of protective reforms depend entirely on their practical application and active enforcement. Authorities must maintain accountability, as continuous reviews of post-reform practices reveal transitional gaps that require ongoing oversight. The Maldives should actively engage its citizens to discuss legal insecurities, building substantial public backing for essential reform efforts that nurture protective responsibility while enhancing child vigilance. Stakeholders from diverse backgrounds who collaborate will establish a robust legal framework that effectively protects children's rights and welfare. The participants stated that:

"Recognising and addressing legal loopholes regarding child sexual abuse cases is a priority" (GOV24)

"Continuous examination of existing laws reveals gaps that need to be rectified for effective child protection" (GOV 33)

The Maldives must solve its legal deficiencies and existing challenges to strengthen child protection efforts. Current evaluations of active laws reveal shortcomings and facilitate essential modifications to maintain their relevance in light of emerging challenges. Involvement from legal professionals, together with child advocacy organisations and community participants. This enables the creation of legislative reforms that directly address the complex real-world effects experienced by child abuse victims. All stakeholders who enforce the laws must maintain their commitment to ensure essential reforms succeed through implementation. Thorough educational programmes targeted at police officers and judges will connect laws to real-world operations and build an alert network to ensure children receive proper protection. Perpetual enhancements to child protection laws create a reliable system that adapts to emerging risks and provides a comprehensive defence of children's rights. A unified

approach and constant connectivity will enable the Maldives to design a resilient child protection system to address future challenges.

4.3.10 Establishment of Institutions under the Child Rights Protection Act (Act No. 19/2019)

The Maldives has made significant progress in child protection by developing new institutional structures under the Child Rights Protection Act (Act No. 19/2019). Specialised institutions exist to create legal settings where children can feel secure and receive support tailored to their specific circumstances when they engage with the justice system. Social protection establishments that deliver trauma-sensitive counselling services, together with legal support mechanisms, protect vulnerable populations from negative consequences during judicial processes. Through dedicated attention to children's needs, their voices are recognised, and their legal rights are protected during complex court proceedings.

Different stakeholders, including governmental agencies, NGOs, and community organisations, must work together to establish these institutions. When these organisations work together, resources merge, and information exchanges enable them to build a supportive system focused on children's safety within the justice system. These organisations become much more successful when they employ trained professionals to manage child-sensitive situations. The lasting success of child protection projects depends heavily on their ability to supply specialised services that address both the emotional and legal needs of minors. The participant stated that:

"I think that after the 2019 Law, there have been no legal gaps except for online abuse" (GOV20)

"Efforts continue to establish the institutions as stipulated in the Child Rights Protection Act (Act No. 19/2019) to enhance child protection" (GOV 21)

The Child Rights Protection Act (Act No. 19/2019) relies on institutional structures to build a favourable legal system for Maldivian minors. Young complainants receive focused support through these institutions while receiving services that tackle their legal needs concurrently with their emotional and psychological issues. Through a dedication to trauma-sensitive care and customised approaches to addressing challenges in the children's justice system, these institutions help reduce adverse legal outcomes. Research institutions direct their resources to help young victims and legal

witnesses function effectively when collaborating continuously with various partner organisations, including governmental and community-based organisations. These institutions enhance their capacity to provide comprehensive support to children in need when they combine resources and share expertise. Audience training programmes for child protection specialists improve service quality. The Maldives' child protection framework will strengthen significantly through sustained institutional development, helping guarantee access to proper support and a voice for every child.

4.3.11 Addressing Delays in Legal Processes

The Maldives require robust mechanisms to mitigate legal delays and ensure more effective justice outcomes for CSA victims. Long-lasting court proceedings create increased suffering for child victims, so creating faster legal solution processes becomes crucial for their well-being. When legal system representatives collaborate with child protection services and advocacy organisations, they can encounter case-stalling obstacles that impede their removal. Specialised child courts offer innovative solutions that will enable cases to move through the system more quickly. This reduces the need for children to speak of their traumatic stories repeatedly.

When legal and child protection agencies receive adequate resources, their caseload management improves, leading to shorter case processing times. Legal professionals who undergo trauma-informed practice training will enhance their case management skills. This ensures that children's needs remain at the forefront during legal proceedings. The child protection system gains the capacity to deliver prompt support and justice for child victims when delays in processing are removed. Thereby increasing public trust in protective legal systems. The participants stated that:

"Efforts are underway to tackle the delays that occur in legal proceedings, which often lead to further victimisation of children" (GOV 12)

"Improving support and reducing delays in critical processes, such as preparing medical-legal reports, are recognised as essential" (GOV35)

In conclusion, the Maldives requires practical legal process improvements to guarantee justice and provide support for children who suffer sexual abuse. The extended duration of court cases continues to harm vulnerable children. So, courts must become more efficient while investing in resources that lead to quicker legal outcomes. The Maldives can identify bureaucratic bottlenecks while developing approaches to

reduce transition time in such cases. Child protection workers and advocacy organisations work together with legal professionals. Proper allocation of personnel and resources to caseload management remains necessary to enhance the legal system's functionality. Tailored educational programmes for legal staff handling child-sensitive cases ensure children's needs remain at the forefront of court proceedings. Proactive measures to achieve swiftness serve specific legal cases and strengthen public confidence in the justice system's protection of its most vulnerable individuals. The Maldives strengthens its child protection guarantees by addressing delays in the process and ensuring swift justice for victims.

4.3.12 Creation of Internal Protocols

Organisations working to protect children face significant control process development efforts that generate structured responses to abuse allegations. The protocols outline the procedures for staff members to follow during CSA events and clarify their respective responsibilities. Organisations can improve accountability and proactive surveillance by developing detailed procedural guidelines for reporting investigations and mitigating abuse. Organisations teach their staff how to operate protocols through ongoing employee workshops and regular training sessions. This helps them understand their mandatory nature in work interactions with children and families. Child safety is protected through this structured approach, while these systems provide a transparent accountability framework for evaluating and monitoring practices.

For internal protocols to be effective, they need to be documented first, and, more importantly, applied regularly by everyone throughout the organisation. Staff use their procedures inconsistently when training resources are insufficient. Resolving these problems requires periodic review of protocols and spaces for staff to share feedback based on their practical knowledge. Organisations implementing continuous assessments develop improved practices to address specific child protection challenges in the Maldives. When children participate in conversations concerning their protection and well-being, organisations gain critical information that guides them toward better-revised protocols that stay relevant and effective. The participant stated that:

"To carry out our works and to ensure proper implementation of laws, we have our internal protocols in place [...] Internal protocols are established to ensure proper implementation of laws regarding child protection" (GOV 8)

Organisations that care about child welfare support in the Maldives must create internal systems to uphold best practices. Organisations require these protocols to guide staff when dealing with allegations of abuse, ensuring that everyone understands their responsibilities and obligations. Applying established measures across the board holds organisations accountable while building a vigilant organisational environment. The effectiveness of these organisational safeguards depends primarily on regular training sessions, ongoing evaluation, and the flexibility to update protocols in response to feedback and changing requirements. Organisations must establish robust communication practices that enable staff members to report obstacles and suggest more effective procedures without fear of reprisal. Organisations achieve child protection by developing robust internal protocols that create secure environments to properly handle abuse cases. All organisations working towards these objectives require complete stakeholder dedication to protect Maldivian children, both physically and mentally.

4.3.13 Addressing Workforce and Resource Gaps

Enhancing child protection initiatives in the Maldives depends on filling human resource needs and resource shortages as essential organisational priorities. Organisations have initiated recruitment campaigns and implemented specialised training programmes, recognising that insufficient staffing hinders their ability to handle abuse cases. These efforts train social workers, law enforcement officers, and educators to develop advanced skills for effectively handling child protection cases. Providing proper funding enables organisations to retain a sufficient number of trained workers and deliver continuous training, while supporting their existing staff.

Collaborative projects among international partners, government bodies, and NGOs are crucial to successfully bridging these recognised gaps. Joint resource management and expertise sharing enable stakeholders to build a greater standardised capacity for child protection. Organisations can gain extra staff resources while helping education programmes provide practical learning experiences by fostering volunteer initiatives and developing internships with academic institutions for future child protection workers. Replenishing workforce resources and upgrading equipment will enable the development of more effective intervention strategies that deliver timely and appropriate support to vulnerable children. The participant stated that:

"Recognising the gaps in manpower and resources, efforts are being made to improve the training and the number of staff working in this field" (GOV 5)

In conclusion, child protection efforts in the Maldives will only succeed if they directly address workforce shortages and insufficient resources. Organisations are discovering that deficiencies in participant training undermine the success of interventions, prompting them to focus on specialised recruitment and training programmes. When social workers, law enforcement officers, and education professionals undertake advanced training, their combined efforts enhance their capabilities in managing child abuse cases. Resource shortages represent a significant problem that demands joint initiatives between stakeholders to share resources and professional knowledge. Together, agencies should be able to increase the child protection system workforce capabilities, resulting in improved operational efficiency. The adequate protection of children will result from effectively closing workforce and sustainability gaps. Continued dedication to these key areas will provide the timely aid that vulnerable children desperately require and help build a safer world for future generations.

4.3.14 Development of Child Protection Facilities

The establishment of child protection facilities stands as the most critical way of creating secure spaces for defenceless children throughout the Maldives. When children are placed into safety-protected areas, they gain access to sorely needed support services, which these buildings deliver, including accommodation resources alongside therapeutic and rehabilitative treatments for abused individuals. Well-organised, child-friendly centres provide nurturing settings that facilitate healing while enabling children to rebuild and gain knowledge and life skills through their programming. Facilities receive the necessary care services through proper staffing with qualified professionals and appropriate resource allocation, ensuring quality, comprehensive care.

The effective functioning of child protection facilities requires coordinated partnerships among government entities, non-profit organisations, and various other stakeholders. When different entities collaborate, they enable facilities to share resources, allowing them to deliver services that address the unique needs of every child. Assessments of facility performance function as tools for pinpointing

developmental needs and would enable organisations to adjust effectively while maintaining service quality for their vulnerable child populations. When the Maldives focuses on building and sustaining child protection facilities, it establishes a robust framework that enables children to heal and succeed. The participant stated that:

"Assessments indicate that state-run shelters for children lack necessary facilities, and initiatives are focused on improving these services" (GOV 23)

Parents must build child protection service facilities to supply vulnerable Maldivian children with secure environments and supportive adult care. These havens provide fundamental refuge, guaranteeing children access to comprehensive services, including shelter, counselling, and rehabilitation. The country fosters an environment that supports healing and recovery by establishing staffed, professional, and child-friendly spaces. Effective and sustainable operation of these facilities requires uninterrupted joint efforts from the government, NGOs, and local community groups. These partnerships enhance service diversity and quality levels by facilitating collaborative resource gathering and knowledge exchange. Periodic effectiveness evaluations will reveal opportunities for improvement. This enables these units to transform into flexible and responsive support structures. The continuous dedication to creating excellent child protection facilities will provide essential safety and well-being while delivering necessary care. This also enables children to heal from past trauma and grow successfully.

4.4 Challenges in Addressing Child Sexual Abuse (CSA) in the Maldives (Research Objective 2)

This section discusses the various Challenges faced in addressing CSA in the Maldives, fulfilling the second research objective and answering the second research question of this study. Despite the government's and NGOs' commitment to combat this serious issue, significant barriers persist. As illustrated in Figure 4.2, these challenges include gaps in the implementation of existing policies and laws, a lack of awareness and training among key stakeholders, and limited resources dedicated to prevention and support. Additionally, delays in legal processes, inadequate facilities, and support systems further compound the problem. The legal framework is often ineffective, and there is a pressing need for greater community involvement in protective measures. Factors such as challenges in policy development, neglect of victim support, and

institutional inertia also hinder progress, along with calls for continuous improvement and issues with the judicial process. By examining these complexities, this section aims to highlight the areas requiring urgent attention to ensure the safety and well-being of children in the Maldives. Table 4.2 and Figure 4.2 summarise the key themes and subthemes.

Table 4.2
Challenges in Addressing Child Sexual Abuse (CSA) in the Maldives: Key Themes, Subthemes, and Number of Responses (Major to Minor)

No.	Subtheme	Number of Responses
	Challenges in addressing child sexual abuse (CSA) in the Maldives	54 (Total)
1	Lack of awareness and training	11
2	Implementation gaps in policies and laws	7
3	Resource limitations	7
4	Delays in legal processes	6
5	Inadequate facilities and support systems	6
6	Institutional challenges and inertia	4
7	Ineffective legal framework	3
8	Neglect of victim support	3
9	Challenges in policy development	2
10	Call for continuous improvement	2
11	Judicial process issues	2
12	Need for community involvement	1

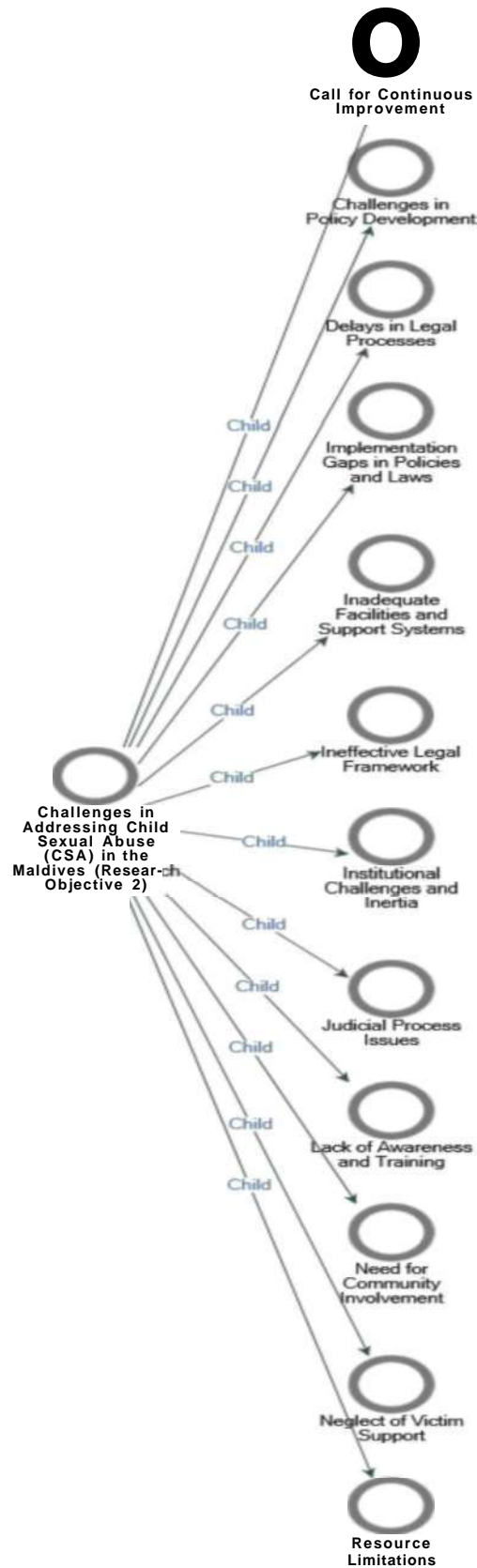


Figure 4.2 Challenges in Addressing Child Sexual Abuse (CSA) in the Maldives: Key Themes and Subthemes (Default Order by NVivo Software)

4.4.1 Lack of Awareness and Training

The Maldives struggles to fight CSA because professionals who work with children do not receive sufficient awareness training. Professionals in both education and law enforcement frequently show gaps in their knowledge about protective laws for children, together with inadequate strategies for sensitive interaction with abuse survivors. When professionals lack proper knowledge and training, they run the risk of mishandling abuse cases. Thereby inflicting additional trauma on victims when they most need care. Authorities who interview child victims frequently lack sufficient training in proper questioning techniques, which may traumatise children again while deterring future abuse reports. The general community shows little understanding of what constitutes abuse and the legal consequences when they discover abuse but fail to report or take action.

Professionals working in child protection services often lack access to continuous development programmes. Static development patterns generate ineffective practices and inadequate capabilities needed to counteract the changing trends seen in child abuse cases. The field needs to provide continuous learning opportunities, such as workshops and seminars, to help professionals stay up to date and ready to act effectively. Professional training programmes must provide education on legal frameworks and instruction in trauma-awareness practices and victim-support strategies. Building relatable and competent organisational knowledge is essential for successful child protection work. The participants mentioned that:

"Such challenges include hiding the truth... the inability to do anything when influential people manipulate the system." (GOV 3)

"There is a noticeable manpower or human resource efficiency gap in this field. While one is the lack in numbers, the second is a lack of trained staff and the third is a lack of professionalism " (GOV 5)

"The biggest challenge is lack of awareness." (GOV 7)

"There are many issues within the community islands, and families which should not be. " (GOV 16)

"Lack of creating awareness and education " (GOV 18)

"The staff are at risk when they do not know what to follow... Therefore, they can prevent exposure to this risk by educating and familiarising themselves with these laws and regulations" (GOV 19)

"We believe that parents neglect the majority of this role." (GOV 21)

"The social protection is still not decentralised, and no one wants to claim ownership of it." (GOV 23)

"We received cases... lack of awareness for protecting evidence... saw a child may come up to parents with an abuse they had suffered two years ago." (GOV24)

"The family, as well as the friends, are very secretive about this from the start." (GOV30)

"Most people are unaware that it is a legal crime [...] not to report. " (NGO 20)

The adequate protection of children in the Maldives requires immediate action to address both professional and public training inadequacies. The implementation of thorough training curricula should gain immediate attention. This is because these skills help professionals in contact with children fully grasp how to respond to abuse situations with wholehearted caring and attentiveness. Public awareness campaigns should expand their focus to improve understanding of child protection statutes and abuse signalling and reporting operations. When education is combined with a vigilant mindset, the Maldives can create communities that effectively address cases of CSA. Sustained training and awareness programmes will build a knowledgeable society that honours children and protects them safely.

4.4.2 Implementation Gaps in Policies and Laws

The effective battle against the CSA in the Maldives is marred by significant barriers stemming from the divide between established policies and actual practices. Similar legal frameworks to safeguard children exist across various institutions, but fail to translate into practical protective measures. When governments fail to enforce unenforced laws, operators often struggle to hold offenders accountable, leaving victims vulnerable to further harm. Most legislation addressing critical problems takes a reactive approach, responding to high-profile incidents rather than establishing a robust framework to prevent abuse. The piecemeal approach to policy creation results in hastily drafted regulations that overlook current field conditions, ultimately undermining the effectiveness of health laws.

Policy implementation faces additional difficulties because reform continues to progress very slowly. Legal enforcement agencies often lack adequate training and resources, and they frequently lack consistent motivation to enforce laws effectively. When systems face multiple burdens, they create an environment in which established rules collect dust because they are neither enforced nor implemented. Justice system breakdowns allow abuse against children to persist unimpeded, which creates conditions that let abusive patterns be sustained through generations. These regulations must be applied with stringent oversight to ensure full compliance, as meaningful advancements in combating CSA in the Maldives depend on law enforcement's success. The participants mentioned that:

"Actions are taken as per laws and policies, but we often see that the policies are not properly implemented and not acted upon. There must be a set procedure and guidelines for the provision of a safe place for the children from their abusers. There should be better guidelines and a solid framework. It is also not enough to have them on paper. If it is written, it should also be implemented. However, unfortunately, this is not the case most of the time. " (GOV 1)

"Specific laws and regulations are made or changed after an unfortunate incident arises, with a lot of anger and strong emotions. Laws and regulations are there, but there seems to be a lack of issues in implementation in the Maldives. " (GOV2)

"The law splay a huge role in preventing such crimes, and at the same time, the enforcement agencies play a significant role as the laws do not enforce themselves... If loopholes exist in the laws that allow offenders to escape, it is up to the policymakers to amend and rectify such laws and continue implementation." (GOV4)

"I still do not believe that the effort is enough. However, as you have mentioned, there are strong, comprehensive, and strict laws and regulations" (GOV 12)

"There are some legal loopholes that we need to rectify regarding child sexual abuse cases." (GOV24)

"I do not believe that the laws and policies in this country are being implemented effectively. " (GOV26)

"In the latest Child Rights Protection Act, it does not directly punish sexual abuse perpetrators." (GOV28)

In conclusion, established child protection policies in the Maldives fail to reach their full potential due to significant implementation gaps. Protective frameworks for children have no impact without proper enforcement or when they allow offences to bypass. This study argues that government bodies must focus on problem resolution, as

protective legislation requires action-oriented plans that uphold accountability and protect victims. Implementing a single point of accountability for lawful practices helps achieve legal benefits. Therefore, systematic control methods must be established to demonstrate efforts to ensure children's safety. The Maldives can begin to fill these gaps by improving compliance with protective laws and creating a secure space for children.

4.4.3 Resource Limitations

Limited funding is a widespread barrier that makes it more challenging for government agencies and non-profit organisations in the Maldives to manage CSA effectively. The successful implementation of broad child protection programmes depends on sufficient funding to meet staff requirements and training needs, as well as to build the necessary victim support structures. Organisations' inability to adequately address abuse cases stems from limited budgets. Deficient operational procedures create delayed casework interventions, which expose child victims to dangerous abuse conditions. Financial restrictions organisations face force them to underfund core preventive outreach, public awareness, and victim support functions, reducing their effectiveness.

The establishment of essential infrastructure required to maintain comprehensive child protection operations frequently remains inadequate. Child victims experience prolonged trauma because they lack access to crucial mental health treatments in all settings. Numerous organisations that rely on irregular international support and philanthropic donations face ongoing challenges in sustaining their operational services. A dependable budget line item devoted to child protection programmes enables the development of efficient systems that stop abuse incidents and support victims immediately. Enhancing child protection initiatives in the Maldives requires solving critical resource constraints as a crucial first step. The participant mentioned that:

"One, you must have proper housing in place... There is a limited number of personnel who have been trained to attend to these issues." (GOV 10)

"Some of them are not trained and do not know how to attend to the children properly. This is something that I have noticed." (GOV 15)

"I feel... the most important part, and that work is not being carried out, whether it could be the capacity or the financial situation, and the lack of

support that should come with it. Many of these things could hinder things from being carried out accordingly. " (GOV16)

"There is no place to keep them until the authorities can find a solution." (GOV22)

"The other thing is... this issue is still not a priority when it comes to budgeting." (GOV23)

"We do not have competent and trained staff to handle investigations..." (GOV27)

"The challenge is that there is a lack of individuals with an interest in working in this area. " (GOV33)

In summary, resource management is a fundamental strategy for strengthening the Maldives' child protection framework. Child protection initiatives obtain their most effective results when victim support facilities are adequate, and personnel receive appropriate training alongside sufficient funding. The government must maintain prolonged funding investment in child welfare initiatives to protect victims while implementing preventive actions effectively. Resource allocation for child protection investment enables the government and NGOs to build stronger infrastructure to address CSA in its complexity. When the Maldives addresses funding constraints, the nation will improve its capacity to protect children and create spaces where children thrive post-abuse.

4.4.4 Delays in Legal Processes

CSA case legal delays create significant difficulties that harm victims and their families across the Maldives. Multiple factors contribute to these delays in criminal proceedings. These include bureaucratic red tape, court backlogs, and inadequate representation for victims. Child victims may develop feelings of hopelessness and victimisation because their cases must wait an excessively long time in the legal system. The prolonged uncertainty inflicts further trauma. Children experience an enormous mental impact in extended court procedures, which causes some victims to avoid seeking justice even after their cases finally end. The prolonged judicial process negatively affects community perceptions of the legal system, leading to fewer reported incidents.

These lengthy delays have a profound impact on victims, extending beyond emotional damage. Toxic levels of impunity in criminal offences are produced by slow legal system responses that drive down public trust in justice institutions. The strong force that victims and their families face compels them to pull their evidence statements back and drop legal accusations, leading to ongoing abuse and silence in society. Measures should be implemented that combine quick legal process delivery with prompt victim assistance and timely justice. Creating dedicated child-oriented courts will expedite justice system proceedings by prioritising victim-focused outcomes that protect their rights. These courts will address the specific needs of children throughout court decisions. The participants mentioned that:

"The challenges... weak investigation process and the cases ending up not being proven at court. " (GOV 5)

"We may take more than a year... there will be many changes within 2 years." (GOV 6)

"The way the case proceeds in court. The slow speed at which it proceeds. " (GOV 8)

"The other challenge I still feel is the lengthy process [...] When the case moves on to legal proceedings, we observe delays, which is a major issue. When such delays happen, the child is once again victimised [...] We notice that this is still happening, but as mentioned before, the abusers are getting arrested." (GOV 12)

"Some cases are taking more than 4 or 5 years. " (GOV 20)

"Due to lapses in the investigation or the child not getting the required support... included in such lapses is the delay in preparing the medical-legal report because that becomes very substantial evidence. " (GOV 35)

In conclusion, the Maldives' CSA legal procedures are plagued by enduring procedural delays, necessitating urgent changes to the nation's framework. Timely legal actions help secure victims' rights and advance their welfare. However, lengthy court times allow victims' trauma to intensify and decrease individuals' willingness to report abuses. Implementing specific child-focused courts represents one solution to enhance judicial speed in addressing child abuse cases. A swift legal framework that respects victims' needs will build a system that delivers effective justice and full victim-centred support. Quick judicial processing in the Maldives will rebuild public trust while strengthening child protection standards.

4.4.5 Inadequate Facilities and Government Support Systems

The Maldives faces a crucial social challenge because of the insufficient facilities that support abused children. The places designated as child protection centres lack the essential resources and trained personnel needed to deliver proper emotional and psychological healing practices for recovering children. Different causes of poor employee performance result when insufficient staffing causes staff members to carry excessive workloads without sufficient knowledge to support children who need help recovering from trauma properly. Lack of appropriate treatment means victims lack the needed therapeutic interventions that extend their recovery process while making it harder for them to rejoin society. A deficiency in comprehensive support systems produces spaces that worsen survivors' second victimisation process while deepening their isolation.

Inadequate shelter access, paired with fractured connections between child protection agencies, worsens the existing child welfare crisis. Uncoordinated agency collaboration results in fragmented services, depriving children of the essential support they require. Children leaving shelters often miss crucial educational support and specific need-based follow-up care services during their transition. Creating collaborative networks among shelters, therapeutic services, and academic institutions is critical to developing successful recovery routes for survivors. A comprehensive child abuse response in the Maldives depends on creating extensive support networks that serve to benefit abuse victims and ensure their complete recovery. The participants mentioned that:

"I feel... lack of support that should come along with it. " (GOV 16)

"We have still not established the institutions mentioned in the regulation. The institutions that were supposed to be built under the Child Rights Protection Act (Act No. 19/2019) have not yet been built. " (GOV 21)

"If we observe the state-run shelters for children, we can see that these places do not have the required facilities. The state is the parent to these children, and they should not let there be any room for the kids to be abused in such shelters. " (GOV23)

"Even though we have child protection rules and regulations, they are not being read, not monitored, and not implemented as well. There is no dedication or commitment to implementation" (GOV26)

"The lack of arrangement for support services and therapeutic services that the victim requires." (GOV34)

In summary, the Maldives requires immediate action to resolve insufficient facilities, along with inadequate support systems targeted at sexual abuse victims who are children. Healing processes for young survivors depend on capable shelters that provide supportive facilities and complete assistance programmes. Multimodal support stems from the joint leadership of public organisations that create tailored services to meet children's individual needs. The Maldives requires increased shelter spending, robust referral systems, and enhanced mission collaboration to establish a unified system that supports victims throughout their rehabilitation process. The resolution of these weaknesses protects children and allows them to rebuild their lives after abuse scenarios.

4.4.6 Institutional Challenges and Inertia

Institutional challenges and inertia represent significant barriers to practical child protection efforts in the Maldives. A large number of child abuse response organisations face multiple problems, including inefficient administrative processes combined with inadequate investment and weak accountability systems. The paused response from institutional bodies turns into prolonged delays during abuse investigations that leave vulnerable children without needed support services. A lack of sufficient resources and personnel within organisations leads them to fail in their victim support efforts. Thus, it increases both the physical and mental burdens faced by victims. Institutional lethargy undermines cultural conditions in which system protections are ineffective unless consistently applied over time.

Multiple child protection organisations face additional challenges due to ineffective coordination among themselves. Fragmentation occurs in services when various agencies fail to coordinate their efforts effectively. Thus, victimising individuals by denying them integrated support. The lack of agency coordination after trauma presents unnecessary barriers for injured children who face a complex puzzle of noncommunicative services. Authorities must develop accountability systems and foster collaboration among their agencies to ensure effective child protection through institutional reforms. Organisation-wide communication systems combined with defined roles will strengthen the performance of established child protection frameworks. The participants mentioned that:

*"I feel... the most important part and that work is not being carried out..."
(GOV 16)*

"The institutions that were supposed to be built under the Child Rights Protection Act (Act No. 19/2019) have not yet been built. We are struggling with it from the beginning" (GOV 21)

"The institutions do not attend to the issue that much to make people aware of the laws and regulations. There is no public awareness in reality" (GOV 22)

*"Now, if we were to give out awards for making laws, we would get it. We have so many regulations and publications to establish such a system legally. However, the tragedy is that when we make these laws, little consideration is given to ensure that the required resources are included in the said laws. "
(GOV23)*

The Maldives must address institutional obstacles and procedural delays to advance child protection mechanisms. Modern organisations must implement proactively designed strategies that ensure resource efficiency while building accountability structures. A unified child welfare system can result from active agency collaboration, which streamlines the response to abuse incidents. Assessing institutional practices, alongside ongoing reform, is essential to improve service delivery and ensure that Child Protection policies keep pace with societal change. The implementation of staff cooperation, along with bureaucratic reforms, enables the Maldives to create a system that better protects children from abuse.

4.4.7 Ineffective Legal Framework

An ineffective legal framework creates significant obstacles that hinder the Maldives' efforts to combat CSA. The current body of legislative protections that address child welfare and abuser sentencing consists of outdated regulations and imprecise statutes permitting offenders to find loopholes in the system. Child abuse legislation suffers from insufficient definition clarity, which makes enforcement more difficult. Inefficiencies in the judicial system leave child victims feeling let down. This is because their severe cases either do not receive adequate pursuit, or abusers do not suffer consequences because laws and definitions remain unclear. Newer forms of abuse that happen through online channels find little protection from current laws because the system has not developed adequate responses for these kinds of exploitation.

Many victims face judicial proceedings, which can be intimidating and daunting to understand. Trauma-informed practices offer no special consideration for child victims, so their experiences worsen already-existing feelings of detachment and terror. Testimonies conducted without a protective and safe space will harm victims emotionally even more. Protecting children from sexual abuse requires the Maldives to reform its laws by closing incompatible legal sections and adding thorough child-sensitive guidelines and novel definitions. The legal system can become more operational through expert involvement in the legislative development process. This provides adequate protection from abuse and support services for victims throughout their justice journey. The participants mentioned that:

"The current child abuse-related act/law is quite old. However, it remains highly effective. However, to adhere and act according to the law, we face many difficulties from a lack of information and details, for example, how the statement should be taken. " (GOV 6)

"Sometimes the laws are written not in the way that things happen nor in a way that is possible to implement at ground level" (GOV 15)

"There are some legal loopholes that we need to rectify regarding child sexual abuse cases. Having said that, there are some excellent points in the laws as well" (GOV24)

In conclusion, the Maldives must urgently reassess its CSA laws, as they are failing to achieve their intended goals. Existing laws need revision to refine their definitions and, through reform, eliminate loopholes that allow offenders to exploit them. The creation of an effective enforcement mechanism requires laws that account for traditional as well as novel child abuse practices. The revision process of the legal framework benefits from collaboration between child protection experts, community stakeholders, and child victims. It ensures the development of modern and appropriate laws. The Maldives requires immediate attention to law revisions and adaptations because such actions will boost its child abuse protections and lead to superior justice systems for child victims.

4.4.8 Neglect of Victim Support

Child victims who do not get proper consideration of their unique needs during recovery experience severe negative impacts on both their healing journey and their overall health. The existing legal measures designed for child protection have multiple

shortcomings because victims often receive minimal assistance, which fails to prevent their ongoing exposure to trauma. Severe healing challenges exist for survivors because rehabilitation services, together with mental health counselling and social support, are typically missing or unreachable. Timely, appropriate psychological support plays a vital role in children's recovery. This is because the absence of this support leads to depression, social reintegration problems, and anxiety, which maintain victimisation patterns.

The processes that must handle abuse cases frequently place minimal significance on how victims experience trauma from the investigative and judicial procedures. Incident procedures fail to provide necessary accommodations for vulnerable children. So, they encounter unresolved questions and disruptive interactions from unsympathetic support staff during the procedural engagement. Different circumstances and sources of abuse lead child victims to develop distrust because of their confusion about evaluating situations for threats. Consequently, many children refrain from getting support or reporting either because of distrust or confusion about the abuse circumstances. Therefore, establishing trauma-educated response strategies focusing on victim safety is essential to enhancing child protection achievements. Victims will increase their chances of recovery by accessing coordinated, comprehensive support services that facilitate their reintegration into society. The participants mentioned that:

"When such delays happen, the child is once victimised again... Therefore, when the legal process goes on, the child may get victimised again " (GOV 12)

"The law is framed to avoid repetitive exposure. However, the victim must report to the police, come here, and also contact Child Protection Services. Some are not trained and do not know how to attend to the children properly " (GO V15)

"Due to lapses in the investigation or the child not getting the required support, which may not necessarily be by the police, but there are lapses in the support that need to be provided to the child/victim. " (GOV35)

In conclusion, the solution to comprehensive child protection in the Maldives requires immediate action to address inadequate support systems for abandoned victims. Children who experience abuse need comprehensive support services, including both mental health therapy and social rehabilitation programmes alongside legal protection. Providing trauma-informed practices across all response systems is the

essential step required to develop healing environments for victims. The Maldives can foster an atmosphere of empowerment among victims by prioritising survivor recovery as its leading child protection approach. Child protection programs will be most effective when they understand the diverse needs of victims, enabling children to regain their lives.

4.4.9 Challenges in Policy Development

Multiple barriers prevent the Maldives from developing effective policies to combat CSA. Policymaking often exists as a reactive measure, with new laws primarily emerging following prominent abuse incidents that draw public attention. Hasty policy development driven by reactive decisions results in unsatisfactory approaches that overlook many key factors affecting child protection. Efforts to prevent abuse face deficiencies because laws tend to fall short in providing both future planning and detailed strategies. A new policy-making framework needs to be developed, starting with extensive research and early stakeholder interactions to create policies that address current needs.

Chancellor changes and government instability tend to disrupt child protection programmes. Thus, rolling back the achievements enacted by prior leadership groups. Critical child protection initiatives stall or are eliminated when governmental leadership fails to prioritise child protection. The development of efficient child protection policies requires active involvement from victims alongside child protection specialists and community leaders to maximise support for children's human rights and welfare. Multiple perspectives, merged through collaborative work, enable continuous improvement in the Maldives' child protection standards. A constant discussion among stakeholders helps ensure compliance with evolving child-rearing requirements in society. The participants mentioned that:

"The first thing is that there are major problems with how laws and regulations are passed in the Maldives [...] in my opinion, how one law may be held above other laws and the conflicts between them when arising within the system; there is no solution brought for this" (GOV 31)

"I think there was not enough time to have a thorough analysis of how much the laws and regulations were aligned" (GOV33)

To conclude, policy development for CSA needs to shift toward a proactive, informed approach given the related challenges in the Maldives. Policymakers must conduct detailed evaluations alongside stakeholder discussions to establish policies that align with societal needs and values. A combined framework involving survivors' personal stories, expert advice, and service provider expertise will help policymakers develop comprehensive, evidence-driven policies addressing systemic problems and single incidents of abuse. By prioritising transparency alongside accountability and maintaining a long-term commitment to child protection, the Maldives will create a stronger legal framework that puts children's welfare at its core.

4.4.10 Call for Continuous Improvement

Modernising CSA prevention requires continuous improvement strategies as the Maldives experiences emerging social structures and abuse techniques shifting. Public entities now understand that laws must evolve to match emerging challenges, including online child abuse and evolving community perspectives on child defence demands. Existing laws will achieve success provided they keep pace with modern and traditional forms of abuse. Continuous evaluation of policies, incorporating evidence-based and best-practice considerations, helps maintain proactive safeguards rather than reactive approaches to child protection.

Progress in child protection relies heavily on ongoing education among practitioners working in this field. Employees operating within the system must stay up to date on evolving research and methodologies while developing the ability to implement modern practices that effectively support victims. Dedicated training for child protection practitioners should include trauma-informed care alongside legal expertise and collaborative practice to build specialised workers who can handle the multiple levels of CSA issues. Focusing on continuous improvement will build system resilience, ensuring that children in the Maldives receive the full protection they require. The participants mentioned that:

"As the society changes, there would be changes to the laws and regulations. As new evidence comes into existence, like scientific evidence, we must cater to it" (GOV 17)

"There are many important factors within the legal boundaries. The next step would be implementation. [...] Even if there are protocols, we must adhere to them. Because of these gaps, those who implement them must give

them due consideration. This is not just about one child; it is something passed down through many generations. The child's entire future is impacted" (GOV36)

In conclusion, the Maldives requires a sustained commitment to continuous improvement when addressing CSA, particularly in the face of evolving social environments. Effective child protection frameworks require continuous evolution to keep pace with new legislative developments and social advancements. Regular training and professional development of child welfare professionals allow the Maldives to build skilled teams that address multiple child-related needs. An effective response will emerge from active coordination between government institutions, non-profit groups, and community organisations, creating an adaptive system. Embracing continuous improvement will help ensure effective child protection systems that fully protect children's rights and address their health needs across the Maldives.

4.4.11 Judicial Process Issues

The judiciary's current functioning creates substantial barriers to effective CSA case management in the Maldives. Bureaucratic complexity, overloaded courts, and inadequate victim advocacy create productivity problems that slow legal processes at various stages. Child victims complete lengthy trial periods, which intensify their trauma because they become uncertain about receiving justice. Process delays can inflict emotional harm on children that creates adverse long-term effects, possibly leading victims to stop reporting abuse because they feel disconnected from a system that does not support them.

A lack of specialised training among judicial personnel who handle child victim cases can result in additional suffering of participants in or throughout court proceedings. The experience of watching an uncaring legal system diminishes both children's mental health and their trust in authorities designed to protect them. Appropriate judicial process reforms targeting child-victim requirements are essential to achieving effective justice administration. The future judicial system response can become more effective through child-friendly court process reforms, together with specially trained professionals who specifically handle child abuse situations. The judiciary serves as a healing ground for young survivors. It supports their pursuit of justice by implementing trauma-informed practices. The participant mentioned that:

"There are many reasons... the law aside, there is a lack of evidence. But when we look at the decisions of the judicial courts, we see that there is a fairly heavy punishment if the crime is proven " (GOV 17)

"The biggest challenge is that I feel... collecting evidence based on the case type." (GOV30)

Effective legal responses for CSA cases in the Maldives require prioritising judicial process improvements. Efficient court operations through process optimisation and the training of expert legal staff will make the judicial system more productive. Child-friendly court procedures, designed to support victims, will create a more welcoming environment for young victims during their testimony. The judiciary should adopt comprehensive reforms that respect children's voices and promise better care for their welfare. These strategic improvements will make the legal system more efficient and rebuild public confidence in judicial proceedings. This is because they demonstrate the Maldives' sustained commitment to safeguarding vulnerable citizens.

4.4.12 Need for Community Involvement

Despite recognising its essential role, the government's initiatives fail to effectively engage community members across the Maldives in efforts to address CSA. A lack of public understanding of safeguarding practices for children is a barrier to community participation. People lack enough knowledge about abuse indicators and intervention practices, leading to silent tolerance within communities. Mobilising local resources depends on sufficient community awareness of CSA and fostering child-friendly environments. Managing active discussions about child protection allows communities to eliminate abuse stigma while creating numerous opportunities for protective action.

Young people's active involvement is pivotal to developing environments grounded in shared empathy and heightened awareness of CSA. The education of youth in abuse detection creates radical change in how the next generation responds to child abuse. This is because it gives them practical reporting abilities while making them age-specific anti-abuse advocates. Public outreach programmes incorporating members of all age groups together with community civic organisations help build recognition and develop intervention readiness against child abuse. The collaborative work expands advocacy reach by developing a network of local supporters whose collective efforts

strengthen child protection measures. Community-initiated open spaces where abuse topics create a new environment of empowerment for both prevention and healing purposes within local communities. The participant mentioned that:

"The youth and the public both feel that implementation works are the role or duty of the government. However, I know that the government alone is not enough for this. The public needs to be involved, and so does the youth [...] Public needs to be involved, and so does the youth. Teenagers also need to contribute and support this work because, looking into the days ahead, these kids are our future." (GOV 11)

In summary, community involvement is essential for preventing CSA as an effective strategy in the Maldives. Community-based active participation enhances public knowledge and enables involvement in child protection programmes. Public education programmes that demonstrate why prevention matters build communities that monitor child safety and promote the protection of children's rights. Local stakeholders can build stronger networks to protect children by working with youth participants and engaging their communities to strengthen government-sponsored prevention programs. Incorporating community members' voices and their direct actions will lead to improved results in child protection strategies.

4.5 Effective Approaches for Addressing Child Sexual Abuse (CSA) in the Maldives (Research Objective 3)

This section discusses effective approaches for addressing CSA in the Maldives, focusing on strategies that can significantly enhance the government's response to this pressing issue. This section fulfils the third research objective and answers the third research question of this study. As illustrated in Figure 4.3, addressing CSA requires a multifaceted approach that includes strengthening the enforcement of laws and regulations, enhancing stakeholder awareness and training, effective resource allocation, and infrastructure development. Engaging communities and youth, establishing a legal framework, implementing reforms, addressing systemic challenges, promoting accountability, and fostering inter-agency collaboration are vital components. Furthermore, addressing evidence and procedural difficulties, building public trust in child protection systems, and implementing long-term evaluation strategies can create a sustainable and effective response to CSA. By exploring these approaches, this section aims to offer actionable recommendations for the Maldives to

protect its children better and foster a safer environment. Table 4.3 and Figure 4.3 summarise the key themes and subthemes.

Table 4.3
Effective Approaches for Addressing Child Sexual Abuse (CSA) in the Maldives: Key Themes, Subthemes, and Number of Responses (Major to Minor)

No.	Subtheme	Number of Responses
	Effective approaches for addressing child sexual abuse (CSA) in the Maldives	46 (Total)
1	Enhancing awareness and training	8
2	Resource allocation and infrastructure	6
3	Long-term strategy and evaluation	6
4	Legal framework and reforms	6
5	Enhancing inter-agency collaboration	5
6	Building public trust in child protection systems	4
7	Systemic challenges and accountability	3
8	Strengthening the implementation of laws and regulations	3
9	Addressing evidence and procedural challenges	3
10	Community and youth involvement	2

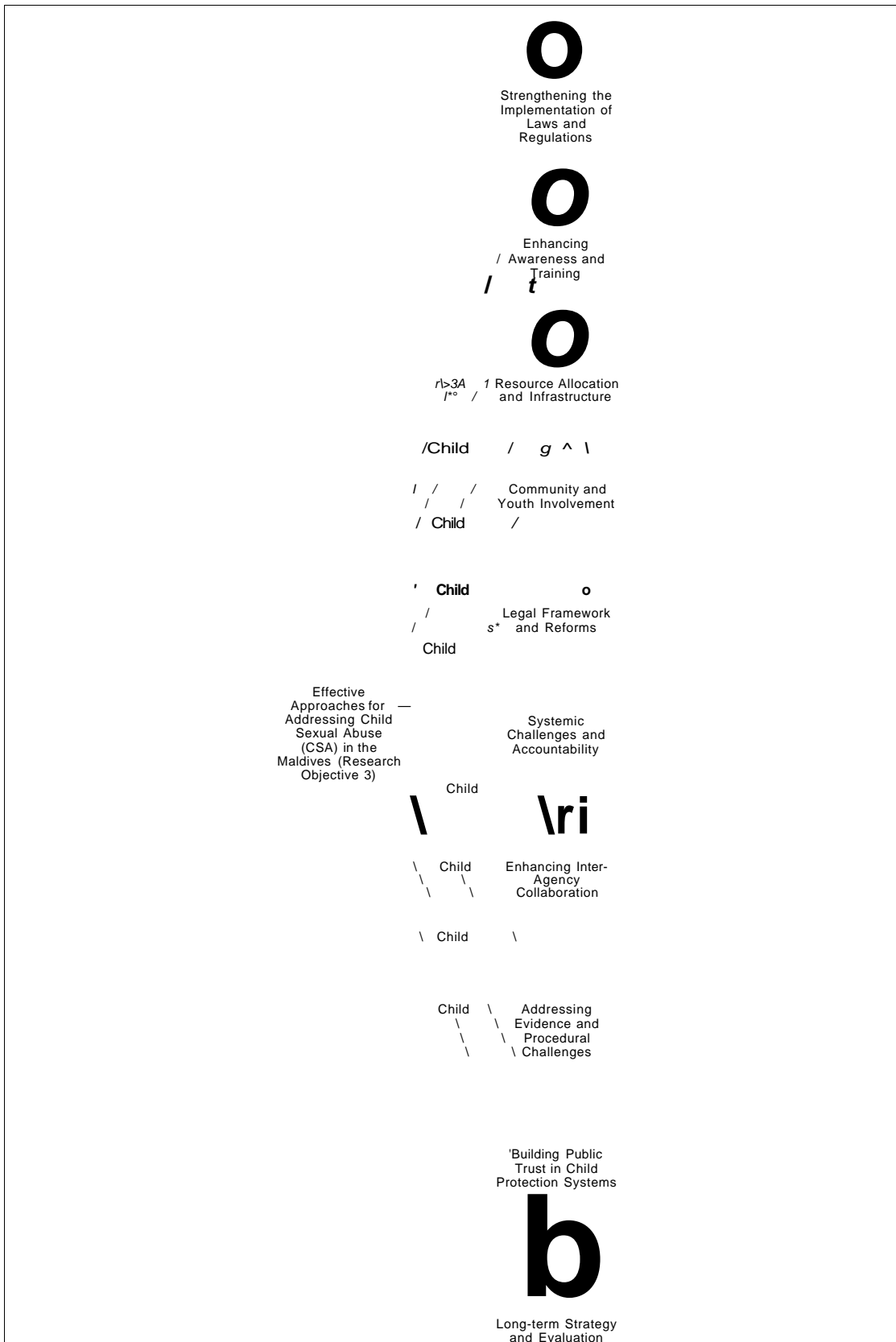


Figure 4.3 Effective Approaches for Addressing Child Sexual Abuse (CSA) in the Maldives: Key Themes and Subthemes (Default Order by NVivo Software)

4.5.1 Enhancing Awareness and Training

Educating both adults and children serves as the cornerstone in the fight against the sexual abuse of children. Community members benefit from comprehensive educational programmes on child protection that train educators alongside healthcare providers, social workers, and law enforcement personnel. The complete understanding shared by people is essential. This is because it allows community members to recognise potential cases of abuse and activate thorough reporting procedures. Core training curricula for mandatory child abuse reporting personnel should feature comprehensive content on legal reporting obligations combined with learning about trauma-sensitive practices and specific communication skills that help child victims feel confident about sharing abuse symptoms.

The broader population needs to be made aware through awareness programmes about how common child abuse is, along with its recognisable symptoms. Social awareness initiatives must accomplish two key objectives. First, build public support through community advocacy, and second, erase the fears that stop people from sharing information about child abuse cases. Society becomes more protective of children when the community becomes better informed about child abuse. This allows them to notice warning signs and take proper action when abuse occurs. These prevention messages can be strengthened through partnerships with child protection-focused NGOs. NGOs can organise educational workshops to help extend such knowledge continually. Such combined approaches will establish a new standard for a society that prioritises children's protection above all else. The participants mentioned that:

"Awareness is a major solution... we need to change the narrow approach and perspective we have towards our lives and our country. " (GOV 3)

"There needs to be educational programs to raise awareness... If a child knows more about sexual harassment... they would be educated to protect themselves." (GOV4)

"More awareness needs to be raised on the importance of reporting... The public needs more awareness on these factors, which will prevent future victims [...] Training should focus on how to handle child statements appropriately, as current guidelines are still being finalised. " (GOV 6)

"We should encourage individual responsibilities... Government-level campaigns to create awareness need to increase and should engage the people." (GOV9)

"Awareness is the most important thing... it needs to be included in the national curriculum. " (GOV 17)

"A comprehensive training program for all professionals involved in child protection should be developed to ensure they understand their legal and ethical responsibilities [...] The community can bring a change to the issues regarding children... conduct symposiums and such forums to highlight the importance of collaborative efforts. " (GOV 19)

"Public education campaigns are vital to raise awareness about the legal obligation to report child abuse, thereby fostering a culture of accountability" (NGO 20)

"Awareness is critical; we need to educate parents, prevent them from being re-victimised." (GOV33)

In conclusion, effective CSA solutions require greater community awareness and regular training. An informed community needs education programmes to teach its members to recognise signs of abuse and to take appropriate action. The Maldives can foster shared vigilance to protect children by involving both professionals and community members. A knowledgeable populace about child protection will actively protect young people through appropriate actions, which collectively make an environment that both deters abuse and supports victims. Portions of continuous training and education for adults can generate powerful improvements for both sexual abuse reporting systems and prevention practices.

4.5.2 Resource Allocation and Infrastructure

Fighting CSA in the Maldives depends on sufficient funding and proper infrastructure. The fight against CSA needs adequate resource allocation for establishing child-protection areas since most victims stay in state-run shelters. Federal investments in built facilities provide children with safe accommodation and rehabilitation services, including psychological counselling and healthcare. The most critical priority for addressing CSA requires the increased development of the workforce alongside qualified professionals who directly support victims of abuse. Professionals working with victims need specialised knowledge and dedicated protective and support tools.

It is necessary for the government to evaluate its existing child protection infrastructure. Assessments must examine facility layouts and procedures that handle abuse reports across different organisational structures. Improving these systems requires funding for data-collection technologies and for case management systems that

automate processes to enhance response efficiency and effectiveness. Local NGOs partnering with communities facilitate infrastructure development through additional support, thereby enabling coordinated child safety efforts. A properly funded and organised child protection system will enhance operational effectiveness, making vulnerable children safer. The participants mentioned that:

"The government must prioritise increasing human resources and investing in training for personnel within child protection services to address current gaps [...] The government needs to prioritise this issue. There needs to be a better allocation of budget and resources for the cause. " (GOV 5)

"All institutions and relevant fields have very few staff and resources, which is the main issue. " (GOV 13)

"Allocating a dedicated budget to child protection agencies is crucial to enable them to provide the necessary resources and support effectively" (GOV 16)

"The legal structure is perfect... if the government gives it a good budget, we can see the results. " (GOV21)

"The budget of the Gender Ministry needs to be increased. " (GOV 22)

"Immediate upgrades to state-run shelters for children are necessary to ensure they meet safety and care standards" (GOV23)

In summary, the framework's success in protecting children depends on effectively utilising resources and building quality infrastructure within the Maldives. Better outcomes in abuse victim assistance require investment in child-friendly environments and adequate financial support for staffing, as well as program delivery. Integrating current facilities with comprehensive trauma care practices and structured support systems creates an effective system for improving child welfare. Fundamental support for child protection programs will enable the Maldives to safeguard children in need. Thereby generating stronger, safer neighbourhoods throughout the country.

4.5.3 Long-term Strategy and Evaluation

Implementing a long-term strategy for child protection in the Maldives requires a systematic evaluation system with ongoing improvement methods. Operational benchmarks set regular assessment points that stakeholders use to identify opportunities for improvement and areas requiring attention. The evaluation process must gather data on abuse rates, intervention success metrics, and input from affected children and community members. The Maldives should utilise evidence-based methods to enhance

its policies and practices. This ensures that its child protection efforts remain effective in addressing the most pressing child protection challenges.

Future programmes must incorporate insights from active evaluations, as this process enables adaptation to new challenges and emerging issues. Academic institutions, NGOs, and other stakeholders should be involved in research examining current strategy performance and in developing innovative solutions. A prolonged directional view, continuous assessment practices, and adaptive measures enable the Maldives to develop a resilient child protection system that addresses the evolving needs of children and their families. The environment will become more protective for all children nationwide through ongoing joint evaluations conducted by the designated entities. The participants mentioned that:

"Preventative strategies should be a long-term vision whereby the achievements of every five years should be reviewed." (GOV 11)

"Collecting and utilising feedback from victims and communities in policymaking will enhance future child protection efforts" (GOV 19)

"There needs to be uniformity in the level of service provided to all islands... emphasise long-term improvements." (GOV28)

"... coordination, using the limited resources efficiently and working towards achieving a full result for the long term." (GOV 32)

"Developing a long-term strategy for evaluating the effectiveness of child protection measures will enable continuous improvement" (IND 33)

"Ongoing research into the dynamics of child abuse will help inform evidence-based policy and prevention strategies moving forward" (GOV 35)

In summary, child protection initiatives in the Maldives require a long-term approach that combines regular assessment and strategic improvement to ensure effective implementation. Stakeholders can analyse their progress by setting measurable targets alongside benchmarks to guide modifications to their policies and practices. The system is continually improved through collaboration between research institutions and community members throughout this process. The sustained commitment to evaluation supports strategic refinement, ensuring that protective programs address both current and emerging needs in child development. Long-term planning commitments enable the Maldives to establish enduring foundations. This results in a sustainable child protection system that effectively protects vulnerable children.

4.5.4 Legal Framework and Reforms

A critical evaluation of the legal framework for child protection is paramount to ensuring its effectiveness in the Maldives. Despite its established laws to protect children, the Maldives must continue to implement reforms, as evolving societal needs necessitate updates to protective measures. A necessary protocol should be established to consistently assess laws and ensure they effectively maintain full child protection coverage. The evaluation process will achieve a complete understanding of shortcomings and areas for improvement when it includes child protection advocates alongside legal experts and community representatives.

An effective legal framework requires attention to translating laws into practical use through focused implementation. State and civil society agencies must implement standardised procedures for applying the law to ensure consistent enforcement. Law enforcement staff require adequate financial support to receive practical training on child protection laws and perform their duties effectively. The reform process must prioritise child rights protections through a legal system supporting child voices while ensuring offender accountability. The Maldives can enhance child protection by establishing a robust legal framework that effectively enforces and implements laws correctly. The participants mentioned that:

"I think the faster the court cases move, we will be able to identify what is going wrong and how and where to fix it (reform). " (GOV 8)

"One component is the legislative measure... the government must have a cohesive social policy [...J ...those in power... must take the issue seriously... You should recognise serious social issues. " (GOV 10)

"If politicians give way with good intentions, this system will succeed... a very well-rounded legal framework has been made. " (GOV 21)

"Regular assessments of child protection laws are necessary to identify and rectify any existing loopholes, ensuring they remain effective" (GOV24)

"Legislation should be tailored to fit the cultural context of Maldives to ensure that it is practical and enforceable [...] Continuous monitoring and enforcement of child protection laws must be prioritised to recognise and respond effectively to abuse" (GOV26)

"We need to speed up this stage, and it is crucial to do this. " (GOV30)

In conclusion, the effectiveness of the child protection policy in the Maldives depends crucially on continuous legal evaluation, which in turn drives ongoing reforms. Current laws have adequate breadth, but periodic evaluations reveal gaps that call into

question their suitability for covering modern childhood risks. A legal environment that protects children's rights and empowers them to take action will motivate victims to report incidents and seek justice. The Maldives will establish a responsive system that protects children through proactive, strategic legal reform, effectively penalises offenders, and creates a secure environment for everyone.

4.5.5 Enhancing Inter-Agency Collaboration

Effective CSA resolution in the Maldives depends heavily on improving cooperation between various agencies. Stakeholders must establish distinct communication standards that enable agency staff from local government departments, law enforcement personnel, medical practitioners, and community-serving groups to collaborate effectively. A structured set of protocols between agencies defines precise tasks to coordinate actions related to child abuse identification, prevention, and response. Integrating agencies into a single, coordinated system enables comprehensive case oversight and facilitates information sharing. Thereby, enhancing outcomes for victims.

Agencies should conduct regular training sessions together to foster greater mutual understanding and recognition of their respective roles in child protection work. The training sessions will educate participants on specific protocols for reporting abuse, investigating cases, and providing support to victims. Joint workshops, community events, seminars, and partnerships among diverse agencies can create opportunities to build shared missions. The Maldives can rapidly develop an effective CSA response that consistently prioritises children's safety through agency cooperation and unified tracking systems. The participants mentioned that:

"This can be achieved if all of the mentioned departments work together. "
(GOV2)

"Creating a multi-agency task force will facilitate efficient responses to child abuse incidents without bureaucratic delays" (GOV6)

"Establishing regular inter-agency meetings will enhance communication and coordination among law enforcement, social services, and NGOs" (GOV8)

"The effectiveness of child protection efforts can be significantly improved by fostering collaboration among different agencies" (GOV 12)

"Collaboration is very key when it comes to information sharing." (GOV 34)

In conclusion, the fight against CSA in the Maldives depends heavily on strengthening interagency partnerships. The operation of the child protection system will achieve higher efficiency and better effectiveness through clearly defined communication systems and continuous partnership among all stakeholders. Established training programmes and outreach initiatives build protective strategies between agencies. This enables them to work together to handle abuse reports appropriately. Both enhanced victim support and a deeper understanding of child protection concerns within the community result from stakeholder collaboration. Inter-agency collaboration enhances the quality of child protection services across the Maldives.

4.5.6 Building Public Trust in Child Protection Systems

Constructing solid public trust within child protection systems establishes environments where children can safely disclose abuse. This process requires clear communication and total transparency. Child protection agencies must publicly disclose their operations, including investigation results, while revealing protective measures for victims. Public forums, information sessions, and educational campaigns help child protection agencies demystify their operations and help parents recognise their child protection roles.

Independent oversight bodies enable responsible accountability practices by holding agencies accountable for their actions and decisions. These verification entities review child protection management practices to identify best practices while recommending areas for improvement in case procedures. The partnership between law enforcement agencies and local organisations enables agencies to understand community values and meet community needs by properly aligning efforts. Establishing transparent accountability practices will help the Maldives connect more effectively with citizens who trust the child protection system. The participants mentioned that:

"Implementing independent oversight of child protection cases will hold agencies accountable and strengthen public confidence" (GOV 12)

"The general public needs to know... how justice is being delivered... needs to be visible and transparent. " (GOV20)

"Hosting public forums to discuss child protection initiatives can foster community engagement and build trust" (GOV28)

"To restore public trust, child protection agencies should ensure transparency in their operations and maintain open communication with the community" (GOV30)

In conclusion, the public must trust child protection systems so that youngsters can find a safe environment in which to approach adult guardians for help. Transparency, along with accountability, functions as the essential foundation for developing strong relationships between child protection agencies and their community stakeholders. The public's active participation in child protection discourse, alongside agencies' apparent dedication to addressing public concerns, fosters collective involvement. A strong rapport with child protective services encourages children to seek help and ordinary citizens to dedicate time to protect their neighbours. The Maldives must build strong public trust in its systems to fulfill child service needs.

4.5.7 Systemic Challenges and Accountability

Addressing systemic challenges within child protection mechanisms is essential for creating a reliable and effective response to incidents of abuse. Multiple agencies must collaborate to ensure the entire child protection system, from prevention through response, functions smoothly and integrates seamlessly. The combined approach enables the elimination of operational barriers that result in delivery gaps. When agencies collaborate with strong lines of communication, they can efficiently handle reported cases, ensuring children receive help when needed.

The existing infrastructure must integrate accountability systems to maintain high standards of transparency and integrity. Information collected from audits and monitoring activities helps detect delivery system defects, creating opportunities to implement improvements. Organisations that operate independently of the system enable accountability by providing impartial evaluations. This allows leaders to assess case management practices effectively. Building a culture that motivates reporting misconduct requires simultaneously protecting whistleblowers to offer an accountable system. Systems-driven improvements and agency accountability standards will strengthen the Maldives' child protection system. The participants mentioned that:

"Establishing a stronger accountability framework is crucial to ensure that child protection laws are adhered to by all institutions" (GOV 14)

"Critically evaluating the current implementation of child protection laws will help identify areas needing urgent improvement" (NGO 25)

"Addressing conflicts within the legal framework that often prioritise offenders' rights over victims' protection should be a central focus of legal reform" (GOV31)

In summary, child protection efforts in the Maldives require robust accountability structures to address systemic issues that simultaneously undermine their effectiveness. When stakeholders collaborate through transparent processes, the child protection system strengthens its capacity to respond quickly to the needs of vulnerable children. Organisations can detect service weaknesses through regular assessment and evaluation processes and take corrective steps to improve service quality. A unified approach between agencies will boost headway in fast and efficient child abuse incident responses, leading to enhanced protection for every child.

4.5.8 Strengthening the Implementation of Laws and Regulations

The Maldives requires effective enforcement of all laws and regulations to improve child protection standards. The effectiveness of existing robust laws is compromised by insufficient enforcement. Implementing existing laws requires well-defined monitoring systems to detect compliance failures and effective accountability measures for lawbreakers. Multiple stakeholders from law enforcement departments, social services agencies, and community organisations must work together to establish these process frameworks. A routine evaluation should be conducted on existing laws to protect children from abuse. This is because the assessment confirms they continue to meet current requirements and objectives.

Reliable execution depends on proper training and capacity development among law enforcers who enforce these laws. The educational programme must enhance learners' proficiency in protective law by enabling them to identify indicators of abuse and establish appropriate response mechanisms. Implementation demands unambiguous accountability systems that define legal requirements and ensure their fulfilment during operational enforcement. A strategic combination of well-designed legislation and proactive enforcement will yield stronger child protection outcomes across the Maldives. The participants mentioned that:

"To effectively protect children, the Maldives should establish clear procedures and guidelines that ensure the implementation of existing laws rather than merely documenting them " (GOV 1)

"The government must ensure that laws and regulations are proactively enforced rather than only being reactive after incidents occur [...] There needs to be strict rules and protocols that should be adhered to. " (GOV 2)

"It is essential to implement the existing laws with accountability to guarantee that the substantial penalties outlined are enforced" (GOV 4)

In conclusion, strengthening the practical enforcement of child protection laws represents a fundamental requirement for creating safe spaces for children in the Maldives. A solid legal framework requires more than the text of the law. It necessitates precise procedural texts connected to monitoring systems that uphold standardised enforcement. When law enforcement teams implement these laws in collaboration with community groups and judicial partners, they achieve superior results. The practical implementation of child protection laws will help create an environment that acknowledges children's rights while ensuring their security. Thereby, making laws has concrete advantages for vulnerable youths.

4.5.9 Addressing Evidence and Procedural Challenges

The Maldives' Child Protection Programmes require improvement by addressing issues with evidence collection and procedural challenges. The outcomes of CSA cases depend heavily on the prompt and respectful collection and preservation of evidence. Procedures require structured development to gather evidence while upholding child-sensitive standards through training law enforcement professionals and others in trauma-responsive approaches. Procedures protect both physical evidence and the victim's emotional stability so children avoid experiencing renewed trauma during investigative processes.

Clear evidence-handling protocols lead to shorter legal proceedings by producing increased efficiency. A streamlined procedural system is needed to effectively record incidents, obtain statements, and manage medical assessment procedures. Investigators will maintain competence by offering continuous training and resources to investigative personnel handling these complex cases. An expeditious and efficient criminal justice response builds public confidence, leading more people to report different forms of abuse without concern. The participants mentioned that:

"Revising procedures for handling child abuse cases will ensure victims are treated with dignity and efficiency throughout the legal process" (GOV 6)

"Investing in training for law enforcement on child-sensitive interviewing techniques is necessary for accurate and compassionate evidence gathering" (GOV 19)

"Streamlining evidence collection procedures in child abuse cases is vital to prevent delays that can further harm victims" (GOV 35)

In summary, improving investigative processes related to CSA requires addressing problems with evidence collection and procedural issues. The quality of investigations can improve dramatically when law enforcement establishes evidence-related protocols and develops child-sensitive training programmes for its personnel. Efficient procedures minimise legal delays and guarantee fair timelines for justice services to victims. Essential to recovering victims is emotional and psychological care when they undergo legal proceedings, which helps minimise their re-traumatisation experience. The Maldives will achieve better capability for child abuse reduction and vulnerable child support through concentrated enhancements to its judicial system.

4.5.10 Community and Youth Involvement

The Maldives needs active involvement at the community and youth levels to prevent sexual abuse of children, which helps create protective spaces. When organisations conduct educational programs and awareness campaigns, they raise community awareness of their role in child protection and take active measures to safeguard children. Community efforts employ various programmes that combine workshops with seminars and outreach events that instruct residents on abuse signs and protection practices during suspected child endangerment. When communities maintain support networks, each additional set of eyes creates a safer environment for their youth.

The fight against child abuse requires that young people develop their abilities to serve as spokespeople for social transformation. Young people demonstrate advocacy potential because their ability to harness modern communication methods and energy enables them to support prevention programmes and awareness campaigns effectively. Young individuals can confidently deliver essential messages to friends and family members through peer education initiatives to break down child abuse. The Maldives can develop a youth population that protects children and fights abuse by building

spaces where young people learn to respect and empathise through educational activities. The participants mentioned that:

"Local communities should be mobilised to take proactive measures against child abuse by promoting awareness and support networks" (GOV 10)

"Engaging the public and youth in child protection initiatives is essential to foster a community culture that prioritises the safety of children [...] Empowering teenagers to advocate for child protection is vital, as they will shape future societal values and practices regarding abuse prevention" (GOV 11)

To conclude, developing protective conditions for children throughout the Maldives requires active participation between communities and young people. Establishing shared responsibility for child protection is possible through local community involvement and programmes that empower young people to serve as advocates for change and awareness. The collaborative approach raises awareness and fosters more respectful and accountable communities. Young advocates make exceptional contributions to this movement by communicating effectively with their peers about these issues. Community members and active youth will help reshape social perspectives on child protection, leading to sustainable, beneficial societal change.

4.6 Summary

This chapter introduces the complex CSA environment in the Maldives and addresses three key research objectives. The analysis of the current state of the art reveals that laws, regulations, and community engagement systems demonstrate a strong commitment to protecting children. However, the identification of different problems indicates that important obstacles remain. Poor legislation has also hindered the timely delivery of child protection responses due to limited public awareness and insufficient enforcement resources. The literature review of effective models identified critical paths to success, motivating new laboratory approaches and further community collaborations to enhance the protection of children. The analysis has further implications for ongoing issues, even as it suggests that available gains may already be compromised. A more flexible approach would be beneficial for protecting, nurturing, and safeguarding children's rights in the Maldives. The ideas presented in this chapter will inform subsequent efforts and policy advances in child protection.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

5.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the discussion, recommendations, and conclusions derived from extensive research on CSA in the Maldives. The recapitulation of this study section provides a concise summary of the main findings and insights. This section provides a concise overview of the study's essential elements, without requiring a detailed review of each chapter. This section also reaffirms the research objectives and illustrates how they have been addressed. This chapter examines existing protective measures, systemic challenges, and effective strategies for safeguarding children from CSA in the Maldives. This chapter proceeds through the subsequent sections by proposing actionable recommendations for relevant stakeholders, reflecting on the limitations of this study, and suggesting future research directions. Lastly, the chapter concludes by encapsulating the overarching themes and emphasising the importance of collective action in addressing the complexities of CSA in the Maldives.

5.2 Recapitulation of Study

This study aimed to comprehensively examine CSA in the Maldives, highlighting existing measures, challenges, and effective approaches to safeguarding children. The significance of this topic is underscored by the alarming rates of abuse reported and the enduring consequences it has on victims, families, and society as a whole. By analysing the current landscape, this study aimed to highlight the progress made and the gaps that require urgent attention. This study emphasised the importance of a multifaceted approach that brings together various stakeholders, including government and non-governmental organisations, to address the issue collaboratively. Ultimately, the findings aim to inform policymakers and practitioners, helping them create more effective, inclusive, and responsive child protection mechanisms.

Despite establishing legislative frameworks and child protection initiatives to curb CSA, significant challenges persist that undermine their effectiveness in the Maldives. Reports indicate that many cases go unreported or are not adequately addressed due to systemic gaps in policy implementation, public awareness, and

resource allocation. The lack of proper training among frontline responders, coupled with insufficient legal reforms and inadequate facilities for victim support, results in a fragmented response to child abuse incidents. Moreover, cultural stigmas and a lack of community involvement hinder reporting and intervention efforts. Addressing these complexities is essential to developing a robust child protection system that prioritises children's safety and well-being.

This study outlined three specific research objectives to guide the inquiry into addressing CSA in the Maldives. The first objective focused on existing measures to address CSA, examining the policies, laws, and community engagement initiatives implemented. Among measures found by this study are (1) implementation of guidelines and procedures, (2) enforcement of laws and policies, (3) legislative changes, (4) creation of internal protocols, (5) public involvement and community engagement, (6) awareness and education initiatives, (7) addressing workforce and resource gaps, (8) development of child protection facilities, (9) monitoring and evaluation of implementation, (10) addressing legal gaps and challenges, (11) establishment of institutions under the Child Rights Protection Act (Act No. 19/2019), (12) implementation of the child protection act, (13) addressing delays in legal processes, (14) continuous review and improvement of laws.

The second objective explored challenges in addressing CSA, highlighting the systemic difficulties that impact the effectiveness of interventions. Among the challenges identified by this study are (1) implementation gaps in policies and laws, (2) a lack of awareness and training, (3) resource limitations, (4) delays in legal processes, (5) inadequate facilities and support systems, (6) an ineffective legal framework, (7) the need for community involvement, (8) challenges in policy development, (9) neglect of victim support, (10) institutional challenges and inertia, and (11) a call for continuous improvement, as well as (12) judicial process issues.

Lastly, the third objective aimed to identify effective approaches for addressing CSA. Among the effective approaches found by this study are (1) strengthening the implementation of laws and regulations, (2) enhancing awareness and training, (3) resource allocation and infrastructure, (4) community and youth involvement, (5) legal framework and reforms, (6) systemic challenges and accountability, (7) enhancing inter-agency collaboration, (8) addressing evidence and procedural challenges, (9) building public trust in child protection systems, and (10) long-term strategy and evaluation.

The following sections discuss the findings of this study in fulfilling the three research objectives mentioned above.

5.3 Discussion

5.3.1 Existing Measures to Address Child Sexual Abuse (CSA) in the Maldives (Research Objective 1)

CSA is a profound and pervasive issue that poses significant threats to the safety, well-being, and development of children across the Maldives. In recent years, growing awareness of this troubling reality has led to increased efforts to address and mitigate its impacts on society. The Maldivian government, non-governmental organisations, and community stakeholders have sought to implement measures to combat this pressing concern. This section explores the measures the Maldives has implemented in response to CSA and evaluates their effectiveness in promoting child safety and security.

5.3.1.1 Enforcement of Laws and Policies

The Maldives requires the strict implementation of its laws and policies on CSA to keep children safe from harm. A nation requires powerful laws to protect its population. However, the effectiveness of law enforcement defines its practical implementation. The effective management of child abuse reports demands that police agencies need proper training, together with sufficient resources. Child protection units established explicitly within the police force would enhance enforcement by enabling officers to specialise in handling CSA cases (UNICEF, 2024; Ahmad et al., 2015). The specialised training produces officers who understand the urgency of cases and the emotional and psychological needs of the affected children.

Community understanding about the legal repercussions of CSA helps police enforce the law effectively. Making the public aware of current regulations and their penalties deters potential perpetrators from committing such acts (Chijoko et al., 2020). The Maldives can develop an accountable society through promotional efforts showing its dedication to combating CSA. In contrast, residents will actively report suspicious actions, and improved case reporting and a safer environment will result from a greater willingness to report incidents. The purpose of involving community members in

reporting suspicious activities is to strengthen community-based child protection and support police investigations.

Law enforcement must work closely with child protection services to achieve effective case management. Cooperative efforts between these agencies enable them to deliver complete assistance both to victims of abuse and to ongoing investigations. This mutual partnership fosters efficient communication channels, enabling swift responses and underscoring the joint responsibility to protect children (Delpeuch et al., 2024; FATF/OECD, 2025; Pinheiro, 2006). The Maldives can achieve a more coordinated child abuse investigation system through partnerships between social services and law enforcement. This results in responsible justice for victims and families.

The evaluation of law enforcement practices must remain ongoing to identify areas that require reform. Audits of child abuse case management processes will reveal insufficient enforcement activities that enable meaningful structural changes. The evaluation process needs to incorporate feedback collected from child abuse survivors, together with input from law enforcement personnel and representatives from the child protection sector, to ensure direct victim involvement. Identifying achievements and difficulties through existing enforcement practices allows the Maldives to develop progressive legal protections against CSA.

Successful law enforcement requires attention to the existing barriers within the legal system. Protracted court processes, victim support inadequacies, and community disapproval hinder survivor justice. Successful case prosecutions depend on legislative changes that simplify legal processes and provide better protection for victims throughout the trial. Effective street-patrol enforcement and solutions to existing challenges will help the Maldives advance its commitment to protecting CSA victims and prosecuting offenders.

5.3.1.2 Implementation of Guidelines and Procedures

The Maldives requires comprehensive guidelines and established procedures to manage cases of CSA (Child Sexual Abuse) effectively. A standard operating procedure helps public agencies, law enforcement, educators, and NGOs manage child abuse incidents effectively through established protocols (Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare (MOSLW), 2022). Standard operating procedures define the specific court actions personnel must take when dealing with suspected or confirmed reports of abuse.

These defined procedures play a vital role, as discussions about CSA often face stigma in current cultural settings. Guidelines must address the essential components of reporting procedures, assigned responsibilities, and victim-assistance measures to ensure prompt emergency responses.

These guidelines provide essential recognition tools for teachers and community leaders who must respond effectively to abuse (Department of Education, 2022). Training sessions based on this guidance need to occur frequently to provide staff who interact with children with complete knowledge of abuse signals, along with the effects of trauma. Trainees should learn professional methods for addressing victims as part of their educational process. Trained professionals who offer immediate assistance to children bring about life-transforming outcomes in victims searching for help. A system of ongoing assessment of implementation techniques allows for identifying better methods to keep the guidelines connected to their original purposes, which protect traumatised children from harm.

A collaborative approach among multiple institutions enables them to work together in protecting children from harm. Various organisations, including schools, local authorities, healthcare providers, and community-based organisations, should create partnerships to develop standardised reporting procedures for child abuse and management strategies (Ishii et al., 2020). The shared commitment between all members of the community leads to an effective solution for addressing complex abuse issues within Maldivian society. Organisations acquire better resources and knowledge, and establish best practices through coalition building, to deliver a more effective response to CSA. Maldivian institutions will create a safe environment for children by implementing guidelines that actively prevent mistreatment during routine operations.

Creating awareness of these guidelines across the community educates citizens on appropriate actions to take when encountering potential instances of abuse (UN Women, 2021). Guideline-promoting public awareness programs create a forceful mechanism that teaches people to report abuse incidents while educating them about victim support systems. Such communities that establish clear abuse reporting steps will increase reporting frequency, leading to faster victim care and rescue operations. The Maldives can create a protective environment for children by adopting guidelines that empower people to take protective action.

The Maldives employs effective guidelines and procedural frameworks to combat CSA. Ordinary citizens, government agencies, and other stakeholders rely on

these guidelines to provide an operational framework and a means of achieving child protection objectives. The Maldives will enhance its CSA strategy by involving all stakeholders in its implementation, thereby fostering a safer, more supportive environment for its youth population.

5.3.1.3 Awareness and Education Initiatives

The Maldives requires comprehensive awareness-raising and educational programs to address CSA. The purpose of these targeted programs is to provide information about different forms of abuse, together with detection methods and abuse reporting systems, to both children and adults who care for them. These initiatives work to eliminate the public stigma surrounding child abuse discussions as they spread knowledge, which enables people to identify and report child victimisation. Various educational initiatives, starting from multimedia advertising through community events and school-based learning opportunities, help the community both identify and report instances of child abuse effectively (Breiner, Ford, & Gadsden, 2016; Kewley, Mhlanga-Gunda, & Van Hout, 2021; Russell, Higgins, & Posso, 2020). Academic programs need to adopt culturally relevant materials to ensure lessons have a lasting impact on the local community while maintaining their effectiveness.

Training initiatives dedicated to teachers, social workers, and healthcare workers are vital, as they are often the first to detect cases and respond to CSA. Professionals in the Maldives can better recognise the warning signs, report cases, and provide initial support to victims with proper tools and education. The institution can foster responsible child safeguarding among staff through routine training on children's rights and protective legal mechanisms that promote caregiving duties for all children in their care. The Maldives should establish open dialogue programs through community workshops and discussions to help members and professionals share experiences about child protection methods and prevent abuse.

Services should build interactive communication systems that adapt to children's developmental stages and communication preferences. Educational programs can foster child empowerment through storytelling, interactive classes, and discussion sessions, promoting greater understanding of their rights while teaching them how to address unsafe situations (Mohd Amin, Ahmad, & Stoltenborgh et al., 2011; Pulimeno, Piscitelli, & Colazzo, 2020). Strategies that teach young people about body protection

and distinguish between safe and hazardous physical contact help them develop the ability to protect themselves. Children require a supportive environment and authorised adults who enable them to approach sensitive matters confidently (Olsen, 2023). Educational initiatives become more effective with the presence of psychologists and counsellors, as this establishes personalised support and guidance programs.

Educational media outreach initiatives help dismantle social practices that prevent CSA discussions from reaching the public's attention. By reaching out to communities, these initiatives teach people about how domestic abuse permanently hurts people individually and collectively, thus promoting cultural growth of open-minded support (UNICEF, 2014). The combination of outreach to media channels, social media, and local influencer networks enables these campaigns to spread widely within the community, fostering more robust child protection conversations. Survivor stories about overcoming sexual abuse serve multiple functions. This is because they foster public knowledge and motivate vulnerable people to tell their stories and seek help.

The Maldives needs to establish nationwide educational and awareness efforts targeting society at all levels to address CSA. Implementing these initiatives produces informed communities that minimise abuse incidents and provide vulnerable children with the necessary resources to express their experiences of injustice. The Maldives' child protection strategy must be continuously evaluated and adapted to meet the evolving needs of programs, as it is essential for safeguarding children across the archipelago.

5.3.1.4 Implementation of the Child Protection Act

The Child Protection Act is a landmark achievement for the Maldives, representing the country's ongoing commitment to protecting children from mistreatment. This legislation provides comprehensive guidelines that define child rights, along with procedural steps for identifying and reporting abuse incidents, as well as protocols for handling them. The full implementation of the Child Protection Act depends heavily on collaborative efforts among government agencies, NGO staff, and local community residents. The Maldives should consolidate all entities working on child protection to establish an effective system that prioritises the protection of children above all else. The successful integration of the Child Protection Act's provisions

depends on coordination among entities to develop practice standards that foster a vigilant approach to child welfare.

Specific protocols for reporting abuse must be established before the Child Protection Act can be implemented. The protocols establish operational guidelines that show people from educational roles, medical fields, and law enforcement exactly what they need to do when there is suspicion of child abuse (Petersen, Joseph, & Feit, 2014). Proper training programs on the Child Protection Act's rules and duties for protected parties help improve compliance among stakeholders. The Maldives can protect children by ensuring professionals are ready through accessible awareness training and education. Relevant institutions should integrate these protocols into their systematic response policies for addressing abuse.

A critical requirement for successfully implementing child protection initiatives is allocating adequate resources. Proper financial support enables the creation and maintenance of prevention systems, the establishment of training structures, and support for victims, including children and their families. Public authorities must prioritise child protection programs in their funding allocations to develop high-quality, accessible services for children (UNICEF, 2020; UNICEF Eastern and Southern Africa Regional Office, 2020). The allocated funding will support educational awareness efforts and enhance professional training programs that safeguard children and construct better facilities for victim care. The Maldives demonstrates its dedication to child safety by acquiring these resources on both national and institutional levels.

Mass campaigns about Child Protection principles will boost public knowledge of children's rights to protect affected children through mandatory abuse reports. Educational initiatives for the community will help simplify understanding of the Act while enabling families to recognise their protective responsibilities towards children. When communities receive empowerment, they develop stronger abilities to detect child abuse, address situations that endanger children, and generate a society that prioritises child safety (Daro & Dodge, 2009; UNICEF, 2014). These campaigns serve a dual purpose: to show the services available under the Act, to motivate families to request help in vulnerable situations, and to improve access to support for these children.

Understanding the effectiveness of the Act depends on regularly evaluating its implementation to determine appropriate adaptations. Identifying system-level challenges requires collecting data from stakeholders in child protection services. The

Child Protection Act requires a regular assessment process to monitor its effectiveness for children in the Maldives' social development. Through the continued implementation and evaluation of this law, the Maldives will enhance its defences of children's rights and safety.

5.3.1.5 Continuous Review and Improvement of Laws

Reviewing and improving protective child legislation is fundamental to the Maldives remaining actively committed to child rights and well-being. Legislation must adapt to modern trends, as new challenges and unidentified abuse cases now emerge, which challenge traditional societal norms and extend beyond established forms of exploitation (United Nations, 2015). Establishing a system of periodic inspections of child protection laws should help lawmakers identify areas that need improvement and gaps in existing legislation. Constructing a proactive and dynamic legislative approach proves vital to achieving laws that effectively serve vulnerable children, as it upholds the nation's commitment to youth welfare.

Successful improvement of child protection laws requires inclusive stakeholder participation within the review framework. Lawmakers should obtain an in-depth understanding of their legislation's implementation through contributions from legal professionals, child protection supporters, social workers, and survivors of abuse (Falch-Eriksen & Backe-Hansen, 2018). Community leaders and local organisations help expose the particular requirements and challenges children face across multiple societal settings. A participatory approach builds a legal framework that safeguards children through direct involvement of youth and children, thereby promoting effective rights and protection. The Maldives should establish laws via inclusive dialogue, which both protect children in situations of vulnerability and ensure their safety from all types of exploitation and abuse.

The review process must devote equal attention to law enforcement and law content to ensure the effective implementation of existing laws. Law enforcement and judicial operations require the effective identification of barriers that prevent personnel from carrying out their duties as a necessary step to establishing equal legal rights for children. Industrial evaluations need to analyse the instruction procedures for law implementers so institutions can verify their competence and acquire the required tools and assistance. Constant support and training delivered to law enforcement officials,

social service providers, and judicial members will develop their ability to manage child-sensitive cases while complying with legal requirements. The development of child protection laws necessitates concurrent improvements in enforcement procedures to ensure comprehensive safeguards for children's rights.

Child protection laws achieve their full potential when public education builds a widespread awareness that leads people to monitor suspected violence against children. A better understanding of protection rights and the community's legal structure leads to increased identification of abuse cases and, in turn, to appropriate action by citizens (Walsh et al., 2022). Parents, teachers, and community members can actively protect the children under their care by educating them about child welfare laws. The social consensus about child safety initiatives will grow through public awareness efforts that promote laws as safeguards and their protective value. Thus, making the community actively support the protection of children's rights. A well-educated public will enable the country to build a network that actively supports child safety measures and safeguards children.

It is crucial to develop methods for collecting data and gathering feedback on the effectiveness of enacted laws to achieve continuous improvement. The total assessment of child protection case results provides important information on current rules and system procedures (Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development, & UNTCEF Malaysia, 2013). Stakeholders, such as victims and family members, should participate in interactive discussions to obtain critical, qualitative insights into their experiences with the legal framework. Implementing feedback as data-driven choices will lead to legal adaptations that evolve in response to social changes and new security threats. The Maldives can develop a dynamic child protection legal framework by actively reviewing and refining laws that continuously protect children and defend their rights in the evolving world.

5.3.1.6 Legislative Changes

Amending legislation is essential to strengthen the Maldives' CSA prevention efforts. Rapid changes in social standards and the emergence of new child protection threats necessitate continuous improvements to child protection legal frameworks (Boothby & Stark, 2011; Farooq et al., 2024). Legal definitions of CSA must expand to cover contemporary forms of harm, encompassing online abuse as well as human

trafficking. Updating legislation to reflect evolving threats demonstrates a proactive commitment to anti-abuse efforts and enables law enforcement organisations to deliver broader safety measures for children across multiple situations.

Society requires the active participation of multiple interested groups to develop effective laws and regulations. Insights from child rights associations, legal specialists, community leaders, and abuse survivor organisations have generated essential knowledge about legislative vulnerabilities through public consultations (Cody, Bovarnick, & Soares, 2024; Henry, Wright, & Moran, 2024; UNICEF, 2014). Lawmakers develop appropriate legislation by incorporating diverse viewpoints, helping them address the specific needs of affected populations. The joint effort of relevant stakeholders prioritises children's rights alongside effective solutions for the lived experiences of vulnerable Maldivian groups. Thus, strengthening the child protection framework.

A requirement when implementing legislative changes is the effective communication of new laws to all who need to be notified. Extensive, straightforward public awareness initiatives should be implemented to educate all child protection stakeholders about their respective duties and responsibilities. Professional workers who assist children need to comprehend these laws, along with the broader community, who may detect child abuse situations. Public awareness initiatives that explain child abuse laws, together with the steps to report abuse, will transform people into effective partners who contribute actively to child safety measures (Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development, & UNICEF Malaysia, 2013; Petersen, Joseph, & Feit, 2014; Stirling & Gavril, 2024; UNICEF, 2014).

The evaluation process must be incorporated into any legislative change because it enables the assessment of child protection outcomes. Evaluating laws promptly helps us determine their proper implementation and identify areas for further improvement (UNICEF, 2021a). The collection of data regarding child abuse prevalence, reporting frequency, and the number of resulting prosecutions serves as a basis for better policy decisions and legislative changes. The feedback process for stakeholders will reveal essential information about survivors. At the same time, advocacy groups for child protection can make proper adjustments to prevent our laws from becoming obsolete and favouring children's rights.

The elimination of child sexual abuser prosecution barriers becomes possible by filling existing legal gaps in the system. The proper implementation of legal protections

that provide all child victims access to representation and trauma-sensitive support throughout legal events will increase their capabilities as survivors. New legislation should force professionals who handle children to report suspected child abuse because this action will help authorities track down perpetrators more efficiently. Strategic changes in legislation enable the Maldives to intensify its efforts to protect children and address the multifaceted aspects of CSA.

5.3.1.7 Public Involvement and Community Engagement

Public involvement and community engagement are integral components in effectively addressing CSA issues in the Maldives. The process of actively engaging people in discussions about protecting children fosters shared responsibility, helping to build an environment focused on child protection and safety. The public can learn about CSA frequencies, the need to report incidents, and access to support services through community awareness programs (Fahmy & Ibrahim, 2022; UNICEF Maldives, 2024). The reluctance of individuals to speak about abuse tends to stem from social stigma, but widening public awareness enables people to notice abuse indicators and respond adequately.

Public engagement operations achieve maximum effectiveness through partnerships with local leaders from diverse sectors, including religious figures, educators, and community activists. Prominent supporters of child protection within the community amplify their messages, making them more powerful and increasing public involvement through their heightened advocacy effect. Community leaders should collaborate with members to host discussions that challenge harmful cultural perspectives on CSA and foster an environment that holds individuals accountable (Daro & Dodge, 2009; Levin et al., 2021; UNICEF, 2022). The active participation of community members creates a powerful mobilisation force, enabling residents to join preventive actions. Thus, making child protection the joint duty of all members of society.

Local child protection committees provide an effective platform for community members to actively participate in combating CSA. The committees serve as deployed local teams that protect children by conducting welfare surveys, detecting abuse, and providing reporting channels for those who need assistance. Community volunteers should receive training in detecting abuse indicators because this enables them to

support child safety through appropriate intervention resources. The country can establish a supportive environment that supports children so they do not stay silent about abuse through community advocacy networks within the Maldives.

Creating designated safe areas for children to share their problems constitutes a vital component that helps establish safe environments and generate trust between children and authorities. Community dialogues and workshops dedicated to children's rights help children learn about their rights and share their experiences with others. Secure venues that motivate children to expose their experiences of abuse make it possible for swift interventions and necessary support (Salkauskiene, Husby, & Juul, 2024; Travis & M'Clelland, 2014). The discussion process becomes more effective when parents join with children to enhance protective knowledge and safety practices at the household and community levels.

Communities remain connected through essential initiatives to address CSA, as public participation creates adaptive programs that respond to societal changes. Collecting community feedback on child protection issues helps create better future initiatives and policies by gathering important lessons from real-life experiences. The community involvement approach fosters ownership among community members and creates an environment that prioritises safeguarding children as a shared responsibility for everyone. Enhancing community involvement and public participation will enable the Maldives to develop more effective strategies to address CSA, thereby securing children's future safety.

5.3.1.8 Monitoring and Evaluation of Implementation

Evaluation and monitoring of child protection programs help ensure that initiatives to prevent CSA in the Maldives maintain their protective effectiveness. Establishing thorough monitoring systems enables stakeholders to assess the effectiveness of different child protection initiatives in achieving their intended outcomes (South Asia Initiative to End Violence Against Children (SAIEVAC), 2012). These frameworks must utilise quantifiable indicators to track progress during child protection work and identify areas requiring targeted resource allocation. Authority teams can enhance service delivery and child protection methods by utilising data-driven decision-making, thereby improving the entire response system for child abuse cases.

Incorporating stakeholders into monitoring and evaluation enhances transparency and accountability. Local communities, child protection advocates, and professionals should participate in program evaluation to reveal a collective understanding of CSA challenges (Cheah & Yuen, 2011; Falconer et al., 2008; Lu et al., 2022). Joint efforts among stakeholders lead to the identification of efficient practices and innovative solutions to enhance the child protection system. Community input enables people to take ownership of child welfare and to take responsibility for advancing it in broader society.

The meaningful evaluation of child protection practices enables experts to detect recurring patterns and frequency trends in child abuse incidents. The Maldives can identify factors that trigger abuse and vulnerable population groups through systematic investigations of abuse incidents and the ways authorities respond to and affect children. The information obtained will guide the creation of specialised preventive programs to protect vulnerable groups. The analysis helps determine whether current programs are meeting their targets and identifies societal needs that require adjustments to operational methods.

Implementing feedback procedures throughout monitoring activities is highly useful. The assessment process gains more utility through direct engagement with child victims and their families, together with child protection professionals, because this approach includes multiple perspectives during performance evaluations of child protection programs. Survey and interview methods, as well as focus group discussions, yield essential qualitative findings about CSA victims that help develop better intervention approaches (Danaeifar et al., 2022; Hill, 2012; Owusu-Addo et al., 2022; Peters, 2019; Tregidga & Lovett, 2021). Survivors' voices need to be heard to develop services that listen to victims and support them throughout their recovery.

The Maldives must prioritise the evaluation and monitoring of child protection measures to ensure effective CSA prevention. The Maldives can establish a dynamic safeguarding system for children through systematic program evaluation processes and stakeholder participation, combined with solutions to address identified weaknesses and issues. The welfare and safety of children in the Maldives will receive ultimate enhancements through sustained assessment and feedback, which promises the necessary protection and support to children facing abusive situations.

5.3.1.9 Addressing Legal Gaps and Challenges

Addressing legal gaps and challenges is critical for the success of the Maldives' efforts to protect children from sexual abuse. The current legal infrastructure has an essential base to fight child sexual exploitation, although all existing laws need updates that address modern issues and social value changes. The current legal definitions and categories of child abuse frequently pose problems because they fail to include all possible modern forms of abuse that children face. Over time, officials need to review legal frameworks that protect children because new threats, such as internet-based exploitation and trafficking, should be addressed in their evaluations. Proactively developed legislation will establish full legal recognition of abuse incidents and define appropriate legal consequences for offenders to deter them.

Derogations in child abuse law enforcement arise from insufficient training received by officials who work to protect children from abuse. Specialised child protection training and trauma-informed care must be given to professionals who enforce the laws. With adequate training, professionals can more effectively identify cases of abuse and provide appropriate support systems to victims throughout investigations and trials (Walsh et al., 2022; WHO, 2019). Thorough knowledge about child rights, combined with an understanding of the legal framework by law enforcement agencies, leads to streamlined legal processes that benefit abused children.

Public education is crucial in addressing problems and legal issues that compromise child protection. Many community members demonstrate a limited understanding of current laws and child safety measures, as well as the potential steps victims and their families can take. The community can become more informed about child abuse through educational campaigns, which enable reports to be submitted more quickly after abuse indicators emerge. Awareness programs about the legal system help make the judicial system understandable, generating heightened public interest in monitoring and protecting children (Al-Saadoon, Al-Adawi, & Al-Adawi, 2021; Petersen, Joseph, & Feit, 2014; WHO, 2006).

The enforcement of justice requires strategic changes to the legal structure since these modifications will provide better protection for vulnerable child victims. The law must incorporate multiple kinds of exploitation to enable prompt enforcement against criminal offenders. Protecting child victims through legal framework development that prevents their re-traumatisation leads more victims to report abuse. Support services

that assist victims throughout their legal journey must be readily accessible to victims and their families when needed (Woodin & Shah, 2014). Legal support services should encompass advisory, investigative, and court representation, as well as educational materials, to provide families with comprehensive assistance throughout the legal process.

The Maldives needs to address current vulnerabilities within its legislation, as these determine the success of child protection work. The Maldives can build a more effective legal framework by clearly defining laws, providing professional law enforcement training and public education programs, and removing barriers. Better child protection measures should be implemented with actions that support offender accountability and give the survivors the needed support and justice.

5.3.1.10 Establishment of Institutions under the Child Rights Protection Act (Act No. 19/2019)

The Child Rights Protection Act (Act No. 19/2019) establishes dedicated institutions as the foundation for improved child protection structures in the Maldives. Under the legal structure of this act, children who participate in the law as victims or offenders receive protective treatment and consideration of their rights. Specific institutions, including child advocacy centres and family support services, provide specialised interventions that address children's unique requirements. Establishments that foster friendly environments for children will create avenues for minors to report incidents while providing safe recovery services (Gripko, Joseph, & Mohammadi Gorji, 2023; Schafer, 2024; UNHCR, 2022; UNICEF East Asia and Pacific Regional Office, 2023).

These institutions possess an essential function to enhance the legal process for child victims by creating well-structured systems. Minors often face a terrifying experience in traditional legal proceedings. The Maldives can establish dedicated child protection courts to provide cases regarding minors with heightened sensitivity, which minimises the distress that legal procedures cause children. Children who stay in these institutions receive the most significant advantages when they interact with professionals who know about children's growth patterns and trauma effects on young brains. A child-focused approach fosters trust, motivating victims to collaborate with

the legal system to achieve more beneficial outcomes (Cruz et al., 2022; National Research Council & Institute of Medicine, 2015; Petersen, Joseph, & Feit, 2014).

Service delivery is improved, and children in the justice system receive full support through the development of multidisciplinary teams within these institutions. Several professionals from various fields, including legal advocacy, social work, psychology, and healthcare, represent a comprehensive approach to addressing the full range of children's health needs (Gass, 2023). The coherent framework created by this system enables coordinated efforts among multiple professionals who protect children's rights and provide necessary support at the investigative and hearing stages. A multidisciplinary approach enhances service delivery quality, improves inter-agency communication, and fosters better teamwork across departments.

As outlined in the Child Rights Protection Act (Act No. 19/2019), community involvement is essential for creating effective institutions. Local stakeholders, including child advocates, educators, and community leaders, must participate in all phases of planning these institutions, as their knowledge helps identify community-specific needs. The gathering of experts leads to institutions that reflect the culture and address the specific child protection requirements of their local areas (UNICEF, 2022). Organisations should run awareness campaigns to inform families about available resources and prevent barriers to using these services as needed.

The institutions established under the Child Rights Protection Act (Act No. 19/2019) have made significant progress in child protection initiatives in the Maldives. These institutions can deliver tailored support to children navigating the justice system by creating child-sensitive areas, collaborating with specialist teams, and engaging with the community. The Maldives demonstrates its commitment to child rights through initiatives to establish a supportive legal framework that ensures every child receives dignified treatment and care.

5.3.1.11 Addressing Delays in Legal Processes

For the Maldives to combat CSA effectively, prompt legal processes that deliver justice to victims are needed. Long courtroom delays create adverse outcomes that negatively affect child abuse victims both psychologically and, in their willingness, to trust the judicial system. Long delinquent cases in legal processes create new trauma

for child victims that generates anxiety and mistrust toward authorities, which deters them from additional reporting or cooperation with investigators (Baetz et al., 2020; Field & Katz, 2022). The Maldives needs to make quick and tailored legal systems designed for child abuse investigations to solve these problems. Child protection courts, alongside advocacy centres, create special spaces to handle cases with sensitivity through fast, deliberate procedures. Open centres dedicated to child-specific legal cases enable the nation to clear general court delays and produce better outcomes for child abuse victims.

Legal and judicial professionals need efficient training to address the delays they encounter in their fields. Children who experience sexual abuse need judicial officers, and law enforcement professionals need to receive dedicated training about both victim trauma behaviours and case characteristics, to provide adequate support. Transitional programs will provide the necessary expertise through education, enabling professionals to handle these sensitive conditions effectively. Training should include trauma-informed practice methods, which provide professionals with a supportive approach when working with child victims to prevent additional trauma. Continuous educational programs enhance the capabilities of justice system personnel and foster an organisational mindset that actively responds to child welfare matters. When legal staff acquire the proper expertise to handle these cases at maximum efficiency, the Maldives ensure child victims receive timely justice and safety from additional harm caused by prolonged legal processes.

Improving communication channels among legal entities currently involved in legal proceedings will help prevent unnecessary delays in processing. Establishing protocols for law enforcement, child protective services, and legal teams will produce better-coordinated case management (Kellogg, 2014; Lalayants, 2008). Joint coordination between parties involved in child abuse cases decreases investigation length, alongside charging procedures and trial durations. These collaboration initiatives between agencies should be developed through scheduled meetings to establish mutual comprehension regarding duties and procedures. The coordinated efforts of legal entities improve operational effectiveness within the justice system, providing continuous protective measures throughout court proceedings. The awareness of both child victims' rights and legal processing times throughout communities creates family representatives who become active supporters of quick justice while backing delay-reduction reforms (United Nations, 2015).

The evaluation of finalised reforms to speed up legal procedures must be closely monitored to enable continuous improvements in time management. Using system-based methods to analyse timelines and results, alongside critical system weaknesses, yields a better understanding of what warrants further improvement. The courts can improve operational efficiency by reviewing the typical duration of cases. This enables better identification of ongoing issues and simplifies procedural measures. Stakeholder engagement, including interactions with victims and their families, yields high-quality information about the actual experiences of individuals involved in legal proceedings. The comprehensive approach used to gain knowledge about child victims' needs will strengthen collaborative work for legal process reform to match modern child victim demands (Amri et al., 2025; United Nations, 2015). The complex nature of the legal system requires comprehensive reforms and improved communication involving additional training to expedite justice systems for child abuse cases throughout the Maldives.

5.3.1.12 Creation of Internal Protocols

The Maldives needs internal protocols for organisations that interact with children to combat CSA effectively. These standardised procedures establish systematic actions for handling suspected abuse in various environments, including educational centres, medical facilities, and community establishments. The fundamental nature of internal procedures lies in their provision of step-by-step instructions for staff in incident reporting, victim support, and law enforcement cooperation (Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development, & UNICEF Malaysia, 2013). Office policies enable the development of a protective child safety environment that allows for quick and sensitive responses to suspected abuse cases.

Every reporting procedure within internal protocols must include thorough staff training on identifying CSA indicators and the correct response methods. Staff must receive training in operational abuse response procedures and in respectfully handling potential victims. The organisation requires regular training sessions to maintain employees' awareness of reporting procedures and the protection provided by child safety measures (Inter-Agency Standing Committee, 2016; International Association of

Chiefs of Police, 2015). The implemented knowledge helps establish employee vigilance standards, leading to appropriate actions in cases of potential abuse.

All organisations need to cooperate to establish thorough internal protocols. All institutions that serve children need to enter into cooperative agreements to establish uniform approaches to child protection operations. Integrating various organisations through joint training programs enables better communication and more precise identification of protective obligations related to child security responsibilities. Suitable resource sharing between entities forms an active network to support child protection efforts and achieve prompt abuse reporting, while benefiting victims.

Continuous review of internal protocols and updates helps organisations maintain effective operations. Organisations need to adjust their strategies for abuse response when new abuse methods emerge. Staff feedback regarding protocol implementation challenges and experiences will help organisations identify ways to improve their systems and determine the necessary changes. Organisations should assess how their child protection protocols affect their operations to identify opportunities to improve the usability of their approaches.

Establishing child protection awareness within internal protocols and communicating it to the general public increases community-wide support for these initiatives. Parents, caregivers, and the community can better support child protection initiatives by understanding the protocols organisations have established (Wessells, 2015; Willi & Arisi, 2024). The organisation conducts outreach sessions and public meetings to teach families how to detect abuse and about available support programs. Strong internal protocols that gain recognition from organisations in the Maldives will make a decisive contribution to the cross-sectoral child protection initiative against sexual abuse.

5.3.1.13 Addressing Workforce and Resource Gaps

Addressing workforce and resource gaps is essential to enhancing the effectiveness of child protection efforts in the Maldives. CSA prevention faces its biggest challenge because the Maldives lacks sufficient committed professionals who understand child welfare. This includes social workers, mental health practitioners, and law enforcement personnel. Several areas within the Maldives do not have enough trained personnel to properly handle abuse situations, deliver necessary victim support,

and implement protective measures. The Maldives needs to develop a focused strategy for attracting specialised personnel with child protection skills, trauma assessment competencies, and expertise in legal support. Establishing a skilled workforce will strengthen child welfare by ensuring professionals receive appropriate support for victims (Boraggina-Ballard, Sobeck, & Honig, 2021; UNICEF, 2019).

A lack of proper financial support makes it impossible for agencies to work effectively or implement comprehensive child protection frameworks. Fund shortages result in insufficient personnel numbers that prevent necessary service delivery while obstructing awareness campaigns designed to avoid child abuse incidents (Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development, & UNICEF Malaysia, 2013; Mwapaura et al., 2022). The Maldivian government needs to prioritise child protection in its budgeting decisions, enabling relevant agencies and NGOs to operate with sufficient financial resources. Partnerships with international organisations and donor agencies will expand funding, enabling local programs to support their goal of addressing complex CSA needs.

It is essential to develop training programs that enhance existing staff members' knowledge and address their professional development needs. A significant improvement in service delivery requires continuous professional development programs that teach best practices in child protection, data management, and case handling. Existing professionals can access the latest child protection research and interventions through regular sessions of workshops, training events, and conferences (Shiri et al., 2023; Walsh et al., 2022). Establishing mentorship programs and support networks will help retain experienced staff and promote a community-based approach to addressing child welfare issues throughout the Maldives.

Technological solutions are essential for addressing problems caused by an insufficient workforce and resource shortages. Child protection services can be improved by implementing robust data management solutions that effectively manage reporting needs and track cases, while efficiently allocating resources. These systems enable better communication between agencies that handle child abuse cases since they enable quick intervention responses for children at risk. Digital training resources will enhance staff professional development, regardless of workplace location.

The successful prevention of CSA in the Maldives depends on properly managing staff shortages and resource scarcity. The Maldives can enhance its child protection structure by hiring and training skilled staff, securing service financing,

providing ongoing professional development, and strategically utilising modern technology. Future initiatives will establish an improved system that effectively supports vulnerable children and their families and creates safer, child-friendly environments throughout the Maldives.

5.3.1.14 Development of Child Protection Facilities

The Maldives mandates dedicated child protection facilities as an essential part of its approach to combating and preventing CSA. The establishment of specialised facilities dedicated to abused children leads to better care quality when offering support to these children. These protective centres provide secure sites where children can access immediate medical assistance, psychological support, and legal services in a supportive environment (Chang et al., 2016; UNICEF, 2014). The creation of specific facilities that address child-specific needs will assist the Maldives authorities in reducing the traumatic experience children encounter while recovering from abuse. Comfortable facilities designed with child security in mind will make children feel safer to approach support services and communicate about their victimisation without experiencing anxiety or fear.

A child protection facility is a training site for multiple law enforcement, healthcare, and education professionals. The facilities serve as training centres that equip practitioners with the skills needed to recognise and respond appropriately to abuse (Walsh et al., 2022). Continuing professional development programs about trauma-informed care, legal requirements, and effective communication will produce employees who excel in child victim support services. The Maldives needs to allocate resources to professional training programs to strengthen its child protection strategy and equip professionals to better assist children.

Child protection facilities improve their service quality to victims by incorporating multidisciplinary teams (Kutash et al., 2013; Lalayants, 2013). The Maldives improves coordination in handling abuse cases by bringing together social workers, psychologists, legal advocates, and medical professionals under a single roof. The needs of each child are addressed through team collaboration rather than focusing solely on individual recovery. A full range of collaborative services brings better results for child abuse victims, which helps them recover their everyday lives.

Successfully executing child protection facilities requires meaningful community involvement during the planning phase, as this involvement helps ensure facilities align with local characteristics. Families engaging in facility planning discussions for services and programming foster trust, leading them to utilise available resources (Seekamp, Ey, & Tsiros, 2023; UNICEF, 2021a). The benefits of these facilities increase when public awareness efforts direct attention toward their available services. Child protection facilities that empower community members serve dual functions, providing protection services for victims and educational centres for prevention and intervention training.

Establishing specific child protection facilities is a cornerstone in enhancing how the Maldives handles cases of CSA. Child protection facilities serve dual purposes: providing specific services to child victims and training professionals in child protection (Abdullah & Ferdousi, 2024). Multidisciplinary teams and community participation in facility development will help the Maldives build supportive environments that enable children and their families to seek help. Establishing appropriate child safety and wellness facilities will ensure the Maldives' commitment to child protection endures in the long term.

5.3.2 Challenges in Addressing Child Sexual Abuse (CSA) in the Maldives (Research Objective 2)

Despite increased awareness of CSA in the Maldives and efforts to combat this pressing issue, numerous Challenges persist in effectively safeguarding the nation's most vulnerable populations. An array of complexities hampers the implementation of effective child protection measures, profoundly affecting the overall efficacy of interventions aimed at preventing and addressing instances of abuse. Recognising these diverse challenges is essential for formulating comprehensive, long-term strategies that advance child protection efforts in the Maldives. This section delves into the various challenges impacting the fight against CSA, highlighting the concerns and areas that need urgent attention to foster a safer environment for all children.

5.3.2.1 Lack of Awareness and Training

A lack of awareness and training among primary stakeholders hinders the successful control of CSA situations throughout the Maldives due to several reasons,

such as (but not limited to) stakeholder knowledge gaps, insufficient professional training and practice, education gaps in school systems, cultural and communication barriers, legal and policy awareness shortcomings, institutional and organizational factors, and feedback and monitoring gaps. Children interacting with various adult professionals often lack training that would enable them to identify childhood abuse or develop proper actions for situations involving child safety concerns (Petersen, Joseph, & Feit, 2014). When professionals lack adequate understanding about child victim recognition, they miss opportunities to help children through the process of identifying victims, along with providing appropriate case management. A teacher who lacks knowledge of behavioural indicators related to abuse will likely fail to make the required child protection reports to the proper authorities. It permits the abusive situation to continue. The implementation of comprehensive training programs that teach professionals accurate skills to detect abuse reports and manage child sexual abuse cases effectively serves to reduce their high occurrence rates.

Child rights and protection laws remain largely invisible to the public due to limited awareness of this legal framework. This lack of knowledge creates an environment in which CSA remains hidden. Scientists estimate that several households, along with community members, have a limited understanding of abusive behaviours and suspicious cases and need to seek reporting help. Community education programs teach parents about children's rights, combined with methods to identify and report child abuse, along with available support systems. These programs will help families protect children by making them active participants. Campaigns aimed at raising awareness about child protection must employ culturally appropriate methods to reach diverse population groups through accessible communication formats. The Maldives can develop an aware society that will motivate people to act during situations where they believe abuse has occurred, which will raise reporting statistics and protect children effectively.

Child protection training should incorporate all governmental officials who serve and all personnel responsible for implementing policies (Walsh et al., 2022). Lack of proper child protection law education among protectors leads to varying responses when handling reports of child abuse and mistreatment. The development of ongoing training on trauma-informed practice, alongside best practices in CSA investigations, will equip all stakeholders to perform appropriately and address these challenges. Children get superior emotional help and assistance through intervention because social

workers who study trauma-related mental health effects on children deliver better assistance to victims. A properly trained workforce dedicated to dealing with sensitive cases will enable the Maldives to provide improved service quality for child victims.

School curricula that include information about CSA enable stakeholders to develop awareness at a young age, allowing them to identify and report cases of abuse. Educational instruction on body ownership and consent, along with recognising harmless and dangerous touch, enables children to take action against abuse (Kenny & Prikhidko, 2021). Academic programs should cater to different age levels and utilise trained instructors who create a supportive environment where children can freely discuss their questions and concerns. The Maldives can develop an educated youth population through safety education, enabling children to detect abusive situations and make appropriate reports.

Adequate child protection from sexual abuse in the Maldives depends on addressing the problems of both schooling intervals and information deficiency. The Maldives can establish a child-protecting community through mandatory specialised training programs for child professionals, public education drives, official governmental education, and basic school education in child safety. The country needs improved knowledge and competence in child abuse detection because it directly enhances protective services for vulnerable youth.

5.3.2.2 Implementation Gaps in Policies and Laws

The effective assessment of CSA remains challenging for the Maldives due to the insufficient implementation of policy and law, due to several reasons (but not limited to) including policy-operations gap, fragmented enforcement and governance, coordination and communication deficiencies, political and leadership influences, community awareness and participation, resource allocation and capacity constraints, and systemic reforms and modernization needs. Although the Maldives has established policies and laws for child protection, many of these frameworks struggle to translate them into operational measures, indicating insufficient coordination and consistency. The various agencies responsible for child protection law enforcement often maintain separate operational practices. The separation of different legislative bodies leads to conflicting enforcement of laws, disrupting regional uniformity. Consequently, children lack necessary protection in some areas (UNICEF, 2009). When a child seeks assistance

from a local authority, the outcome depends on the location and the agency handling their case, raising safety concerns for the child. Strong communication channels between agencies are necessary for effective policy enforcement among child protection authorities.

The implementation gap widens because organisations lack proper oversight systems and accountability mechanisms. The absence of standardised processes for tracking child protection law enforcement prevents the accurate assessment of outcomes and the identification of weak points (Dovi et al., 2022; Halvorsen et al., 2024). Most child protection laws in the Maldives lack reliable frameworks for measuring compliance and assessing their impact and effectiveness. The lack of appropriate data leads organisations to allocate funds and resources to ineffective areas rather than prioritising child protection as an urgent matter. Monitoring functions need to be developed through a complete system that tracks the implementation of child protection laws. The Maldives can achieve law-based child protection through systematic data collection about abuse cases and child protection responses and case results, which will enhance transparency and accountability to protect children effectively.

Child protection enforcement depends heavily on the policies of the government leadership at that time (Keshavarzian, 2013; UNICEF, 2014). The existence of laws does not guarantee their effective enforcement, as political changes and societal attitudes toward the CSA can affect law enforcement. When child protection fails to secure its place at the national political level, there is insufficient funding for programs and inadequate training for enforcement officials. The continued safety of children depends heavily on civil society organisations that raise awareness and advocate for protective policies. The active involvement of community leaders in discussions on child rights protection creates public pressure on politicians, prompting them to prioritise these issues. Maintaining child protection on the political agenda depends on ongoing advocacy to educate stakeholders about the effective implementation of laws and policies.

The difficulty of implementing child protection policies intensifies due to insufficient community education and limited community participation in policy-making (Latsch et al., 2023). Numerous families remain uninformed about their child protection rights, despite laws already in place and available resources that could help them. The ignorance of community members regarding protection laws allows many children to remain at risk because victims fail to report their cases of abuse. Educational

programs that teach community members about children's rights empower families to advocate for their children and to request assistance when needed. Community-wide education initiatives provide broad access to information, facilitating communication between child protection laws and their actual application (Daro & Dodge, 2009). The Maldives will develop an efficient system for protecting children when its citizens understand their child protection rights through formal education and awareness programs.

The Maldives needs to focus on solving policy execution gaps when working to enhance its response to the sexual abuse of children. The Maldives must build alliances among agencies to adequately protect children, establish oversight systems and accountability frameworks to prioritise child protection in political agendas, and dedicate funding to community education initiatives. All stakeholders should unite to eliminate operational challenges, leading to a culturally receptive environment where children receive proper care and attention in the Maldives.

5.3.2.3 Resource Limitations

The Maldives face significant challenges in addressing CSA due to limited resources, including several reasons, such as (but not limited to) inadequate funding for essential services, insufficient specialized facilities and infrastructure, limited distribution of resources and unequal access, and policy and governance gaps affecting funding prioritization. The essential services provided by child protection agencies, NGOs, and community organisations are not adequately funded, which is their primary concern. An insufficient budget leads to poor staffing levels and inadequate program resources, thereby reducing the ability to properly address abuse reports (National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, 2022). Local support organisations focusing on child victim support lack funding to hire appropriate counsellors or social workers, which prevents them from delivering vital support programs, including mental health counselling or legal help (Zeanah & Humphreys, 2018). A lack of funding prevents victims from accessing the support they need, adversely affecting their recovery. Proper financial investment in child protection services ensures the establishment of a comprehensive system that meets the diverse requirements of abused children.

Service limitations regarding child abuse victims also include inadequate facilities, along with essential services that should aid victims and their families during recovery. Many parts of the Maldives have insufficient specialised facilities supporting child protection, such as crisis centres, emergency shelter programs, and rehabilitation services. The lack of essential resource systems makes it extremely hard for abused children to find immediate protection following abuse incidents (Gonzalez, Mirabal, & McCall, 2025; Merrick & Guinn, 2018; WHO, 2024). Developing child-friendly facilities that offer safe, healing environments and support requires investing in an effective child protection system. These facilities serve as essential safety points, providing immediate assistance to victims and contributing to their overall recovery and well-being.

Child protection programs require skilled personnel, but limited resources negatively impact recruitment and workforce retention. A shortage of specialised social workers and counsellors exists in the Maldives because career growth paths are limited and compensation is low. The inability of child protection agencies to recruit competent staff leads to increased staff turnover, disrupting essential victim care services. The continuous presence of professional help is vital because trained staff manage complex circumstances, serve victims, and safeguard their rights (Petersen, Joseph, & Feit, 2014; United Nations, 2015). The Maldives needs to increase its financial resources to offer competitive wages, establish professional development programs, and create work environments with supportive systems. The country needs to support its workforce investments to strengthen its child protection system and provide children with adequate assistance.

Communities should actively participate in mitigating the negative impacts of limited resources on child protection efforts. Local stakeholders, businesses, and volunteer groups pursuing CSA initiatives can access supplementary resources to address this problem (Daro & Dodge, 2013). The people in nearby communities possess specific information about child victim difficulties, which enables them to create culturally appropriate responses to these problems. Community-based awareness programs that teach families about available resources are an effective way to address service deficiencies. Both entities maximise resource efficiency through collaborative partnerships between governmental agencies and community organisations, enhancing interdependent responses to child abuse incidents (Blessing, 2024; Petridou & Antonopoulos, 2017; Wirba, 2024).

It is essential to address resource limitations if the Maldives wants to combat CSA effectively. The Maldives can establish an effective child protection support system by allocating adequate funding to sustain services, constructing specialised facilities, investing in workforce training, and increasing local community involvement in prevention initiatives. The country needs comprehensive strengthening of resources in child protection areas to ensure that all children receive effective safety measures and support, thereby making the nation safer for its youth.

5.3.2.4 Delays in Legal Processes

The Maldives struggles to prevent CSA and deliver justice to victims due to its slow legal procedures, for several reasons, including (but not limited to) judicial inefficiency and bureaucratic bottlenecks, lack of specialized structures for CSA, insufficient training and expertise of criminal justice personnel, poor case management, and administrative inefficiencies. Long legal processes generate various negative impacts on child victims and their families during the emotional and psychological stages. Prolonged cases often leave survivors without a final resolution, as lawbreakers remain at large for months. Victims who witness an extended justice process develop doubts about the system, thus creating a reluctance to report abuse in the future (Gass, 2024; Ministry of Justice, 2020). The disappearance of trust in prompt and proper case handling leads people to maintain silence about abuse incidents. The judiciary needs to address its bureaucratic inefficiencies to restore public confidence and enhance victim involvement in the justice system.

The high number of pending court cases is a significant factor in legal delays. Long court caseloads delay trials and hearings, resulting in CSA cases taking longer to resolve. These delays worsen due to inefficient case management, insufficient specialised child protection units within the judiciary, and inadequate staffing (Samuel, 2024). The solution to this problem could be advanced by establishing special child protection courts dedicated to handling cases involving minors. This specialised court system would speed up legal procedures for abused children while fostering an understanding environment to treat the complex details of child abuse situations effectively. Rapid handling of legal cases related to child abuse remains essential because it delivers justice to victims at the appropriate time.

Enhancing criminal justice personnel training on CSA, alongside the specialised court system, speeds up legal proceedings. An inadequate understanding of CSA cases by law enforcement officials and judicial members can lead to cases being mishandled, thereby prolonging the overall period of legal procedures (Eilfgang et al., 2024; Mansoor et al., 2022; Sharp-Jeffs, Coy, & Kelly, 2017). Training sessions should include focused instruction on trauma-informed care, child safety legislation, and interview practice, thereby enhancing professionals' ability to handle sensitive cases effectively. Implementing appropriate tools among central legal professionals will expedite legal processes and strengthen support for child victims, as these professionals will have a deeper understanding of their specific needs.

Improved transparency and enhanced communication channels within legal proceedings will reduce the time required to complete procedures. Victims, together with their families, experience helplessness due to a lack of information about their cases. Uncertainty diminishes when clear communication channels are set for victims, including their families and legal representatives, so that families can defend their rights (Adam, Ahmad & Kassim, 2024; Alaggia, Collin-Vezina, & Lateef, 2017; Beagley, 2024; Choong, 2021; Eaton & Holmes, 2017; ECPAT International, 2017; Russell, Higgins, & Posso, 2020; Slugget, 2003; Van Duin et al., 2022). Regular case status updates will help people better understand timeframes and manage their expectations, enabling them to actively participate in the process. Community outreach programs focused on CSA case procedures will increase system transparency by educating the public about legal protocols.

The analysis of legal execution and results should remain continuous, as it will reveal the necessary modifications to the legal system. Regular reviews of case procedures, alongside examination of processing times and operational problems, will help the Maldives modify its legal system through continuous updates. Evaluating child abuse cases through data collection and stakeholder feedback will yield insights that help shape future improvement initiatives. The Maldives can achieve an improved judicial system operation through pre-emptive action to reduce legal delays, which will create an optimal environment for children experiencing abuse.

5.3.2.5 Inadequate Facilities and Support Systems

The inadequacy of proper facilities and support systems creates substantial difficulties for the Maldives in its fight against CSA, including several reasons, such as (but not limited to) insufficient on-demand child victim facilities, unequal geographic distribution and resource gaps, inadequate support for families and caregivers, gaps in specialized, multidisciplinary care, and policy and investment shortfalls. Currently, non-existent child victim facilities prevent victims from accessing necessary on-demand services during their critical times of need. The healing of child victims requires safe spaces and crisis centres that offer emergency shelters and rehabilitation services with immediate care and counselling as well. Children without available resources will stay in unsafe conditions, which creates extra risks for more harm and traumatic experiences. Specialised child protection facilities require investment for the provision of timely services and support to child victims of abuse (Austin, Lesak, & Shanahan, 2020; UNICEF & International Rescue Committee, 2023; WHO, 2024).

Different parts of the Maldives demonstrate wide variations regarding the existing safety network standard. Child protection service resources in certain parts lack sufficient financial backing and have insufficient personnel to make appropriate responses to child abuse reports (Ringel et al., 2018). Locations without trained social workers and counsellors remain particularly at risk because children face difficulties in obtaining necessary support and guardianship. Service gaps in less populated areas can be eliminated through enhanced financial support, worker recruitment, and specialised training for dedicated professionals. The Maldives should prioritise achieving equal access to child protection services nationwide to establish a well-coordinated response against CSA.

Fostering improved programs for child victim families is essential to help them join and support recovery activities. Child victim support depends heavily on family involvement, so services must address both parties in a complete abuse recovery approach (Jangam et al., 2022; Melton & McLeigh, 2020; UNICEF, 2014). Development of counselling programs, as well as legal guidance and family education resources, will help families take an active role in allowing their child to heal from trauma. Creating parent support groups provides important assistance and helpful information, strengthening families and building mutual understanding among members (Daro & Dodge, 2009; Durisic & Bunijevac, 2017; Seekamp, Ey, & Tsiros,

2023; WHO, 2022). The Maldives should support family initiatives that form a complete system to protect children.

Child protection facilities achieve superior outcomes when they include multidisciplinary teams for providing services to victimised children. All aspects of child welfare can be managed appropriately through cooperation among healthcare professionals, mental health specialists, social workers, and legal advocates (UNICEF Ghana & Ghana Health Service, 2018; Van Pelt, 2013). A team of professionals can create individual care management systems and jointly implement them for every child. The Maldives can achieve better results in its CSA interventions by implementing comprehensive services that cater to the individual needs of survivors.

The Maldives needs to address its inadequate facilities and support structures to establish an enhanced protective program for children. The Maldives should invest in child victim-oriented facilities while strengthening current systems through team collaboration, family aid, and facility development to offer complete support that will help children recover from trauma. A well-developed system that addresses the specific needs of child victims will significantly boost the struggle against CSA by providing children with complete procedural support throughout the process.

5.3.2.6 Institutional Challenges and Inertia

Institutional challenges and inertia represent significant barriers to effectively addressing CSA in the Maldives. Systematic operating challenges plague numerous organisations that were established to safeguard children against abuse and prevent them from performing their duties effectively. Bureaucracy and poor information exchange between organisations, combined with conflicting agency roles, result in disjointed child protection systems that overlook victims' needs (Child Safeguarding Practice-Review Panel, 2024; Letourneau et al., 2016; WHO, 2022). Vulnerable children experience delays in receiving intervention support because unclear agency responsibilities create lost cases. The challenge demands well-defined protocols and clear lines of institutional responsibility when protecting children between various duties and within individual institutions.

Organisations find it difficult to adapt new methods of child abuse prevention and novel trends due to institutional resistance toward change. New risks that include online exploitation and cyberbullying have appeared because of technological

development. Organisations must demonstrate flexibility and quick reactions to address these challenges. However, excessive bureaucracy hinders their ability to implement modern and practical tactical approaches to child protection. Professional development programs, alongside training sessions, equip personnel with the essential skills to address emerging security threats and encourage organisational creativity (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2015b; UNICEF East Asia and the Pacific Regional Office, 2020; WHO, 2024). Keeping a forward-thinking approach that follows updates in emerging challenges while implementing suitable alterations ensures that organisations will best protect children from abuse.

The success of overcoming institutional hurdles depends heavily on the availability of sufficient staff and funding resources. Child protection agencies in the Maldives have insufficient staffing, resulting in excessive workloads and reduced efficiency in handling cases. Daily operations are compromised when agencies operate with insufficient resources, conduct limited investigations, provide inadequate support services, and fail to participate in community outreach activities. Organisations must address staffing shortages and resource constraints to establish effective structures that support children (Choong, 2021; Nen & Astbury, 2011; Tener et al., 2020; UNICEF, 2023). Revenue allocation from the Maldivian government toward child protection services should be prioritised. This is because it enables agencies to recruit qualified staff members and maintain operational stability.

Institutions must collaborate to combat CSA effectively, thereby enabling an integrated approach to addressing the issue. The independent work across different organisations creates opportunities for repeated service delivery and impaired assessment of complex situations (Nen & Astbury, 2011; Parkinson & Steele, 2024; UNICEF East Asia and the Pacific Regional Office, 2020). Executive agencies should form partnerships that enable them to collaborate effectively when responding to abuse cases and to help each other develop and implement effective prevention methods. Together with key stakeholders, including government agencies, community groups, law enforcement teams, non-profit organisations, and platform initiatives, the Maldives can create a single coordinated campaign against child sexual attacks. A range of organisations working jointly will overcome bureaucratic resistance and develop new solutions to safeguard children more effectively.

In summary, institutional challenges and inertia present significant obstacles to effectively addressing CSA in the Maldives. The Maldives should implement specific

accountability frameworks to address evolving issues and resource constraints, and promote teamwork to strengthen child protection institutions. A responsive system committed to child safety should be established to defeat child abuse and create better futures for every child throughout the country.

5.3.2.7 Ineffective Legal Framework

An ineffective legal framework represents a significant challenge in the Maldives' fight against CSA, including several reasons, such as (but not limited to) definitions and clarity gaps, weak deterrence and punitive inconsistency, training and capacity deficits among professionals, public awareness and education gaps, and resource and implementation challenges. Legal protections for children exist in the country, but insufficiently defined laws reduce their overall impact. The lack of specific descriptions in CSA definitions makes it difficult for personnel from law enforcement and judicial organisations to understand their legal duties (Ferdousi & Abdullah, 2024; Manoj et al., 2025; UNICEF, 2025). Insufficient legal clarity causes public servants to interpret laws differently. This results in failed applications of the law, leading to increased danger to children and demotivates victims from reporting their situations. A comprehensible legal framework designed for everyday issues is the key to boosting child protection in the Maldives.

Poor legislation results in insufficient punishment of perpetrators because weak deterrents prevent offenders from feeling the consequences for their actions. Potential child abusers tend to perform abusive acts more frequently when they believe punishments will be mild because they correctly assess the low risk of severe consequences (Rosselli & Jeglic, 2017; United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2018; WHO, 2024). Long, complex legal processes often discourage families from seeking justice because they are challenging to navigate. The justice-seeking process terrifies child victims because they must face unfamiliar legal processes that fail to recognise their needs adequately, thus causing more distress. A comprehensive review of current laws should be conducted to identify ways to enhance and reform them, ultimately strengthening the legal foundation.

Enforcing legal provisions, such as Special Provisions to Deal with Child Sex Abuse Offenders (Act Law No. 12/2009), is challenging because legal professionals lack proper training and awareness. Law enforcement officials, together with judges

and social workers, lack a complete understanding of child protection statutes and suitable responses to abuse situations. The unknowns concerning child abuse laws create problems that cause inadequate investigations and court proceedings, leading to difficulties in achieving justice for child victims (Al-Saadoon, Al-Adawi & Al-Adawi, 2021; Mansoor et al., 2022; Myers, 2008). An effective legal framework depends on extensive training for legal professionals that covers CSA recognition, special victim safeguards for minors, and trauma-sensitive techniques. The Maldives will establish an effective CSA response system once all stakeholders have received training.

Child protection laws become more effective when the public understands them. The lack of legal education in communities creates obstacles for victims who need to report abuse since they are unaware of their rights and legal protections. Educational programs that convey both knowledge of legal rights and the necessity of reporting abuse will enable families and local communities to act as protectors against potential child endangerment (Roy & Madiki, 2020; Sivarajasingam et al., 2022; United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2015a). A culture grounded in an understanding of child protection laws, combined with community support, will enable the Maldives to increase participation in child protection work and enhance the prosecution of perpetrator cases.

The Maldives faces substantial difficulties in its CSA response due to the insufficient power of existing laws. The national laws must be clarified, and severe sanctions must be defined for offenders to create an effective legal system that addresses CSA. All legal professionals need extensive training, and the public needs broad awareness. The Maldives should implement these measures to enhance its child protection legislation. This creates a secure environment for children and fosters trust in the justice system.

5.3.2.8 Neglect of Victim Support

Neglecting victim support is a critical issue that severely impacts the effectiveness of child protection initiatives in the Maldives, including several reasons, such as (but not limited to) overreliance on universal rather than tailored approaches, limited access to and availability of services, inadequate family and caregiver support, cultural stigma and lack of public understanding, insufficient survivor-centered practices, resource constraints and funding gaps and geographic and regional

disparities. Child victims need proper support to heal from their severe emotional trauma resulting from sexual abuse attacks. Children who suffer abuse cannot access sufficient support networks that help them obtain needed counselling help, mental health treatments, and legal protections necessary for their healing process (Hanson & Wallis, 2018; Mass General Brigham McLean, 2023; McElvaney et al., 2021; Vera-Grey, 2023). Successful dedicated support services are vital for victims because their absence generates persistent health implications that impact both mental health conditions and social involvement, and life quality (Rumball-Smith, 2018). The Maldives must actively address child victim neglect by establishing comprehensive services that will help fight the sexual abuse of children across the nation.

All support systems created for victims must deliver personalised services adapted to their circumstances. When organisations adopt universal solutions, they often struggle to support the diverse needs of clients while providing effective recovery solutions (Parkinson & Steele, 2024; UNICEF, 2023; Yates & Allardyce, 2021). Support for child victims needs to combine trauma-informed counselling along with legal representation and peer mentoring groups that help the victims face both abuse and judicial procedures. A comprehensive care system that includes psychological and emotional, along with practical support. It allows the Maldives to assist child victims in restoring their sense of independence and reconstructing their lives after harmful events.

Establishing a supportive network to assist families of child victims is essential to serving their needs. When children suffer abuse, their families face considerable effects, which become easier to overcome when they get proper support (WHO, 2024). Parents and caregivers receive adequate support through educational services, counselling, and accessible resources to support successful child care. Families who receive sufficient information and empowerment are better equipped to protect their children's needs by collaborating across academic institutions, healthcare facilities, and legal structures. Neglecting to support victims and their families hinders efficient assistance, underscoring why comprehensive care approaches yield better outcomes (Kopp, 2008; WHO, 2024).

A comprehensive increase in public understanding of child sexual victim support leads society toward cultural recognition of the necessary compassion toward survivors. Educational programs for the public must promote awareness about abuse along with protection from social condemnation so people can receive assistance before facing prejudice (Centre of Expertise on Child Sexual Abuse, 2022b; Letourneau et al.,

2016). Survivor stories presented in open discussion enable dialogue about healing and support, increasing the likelihood that victims will access help at the appropriate time. When the Maldives establishes itself as a victim-supporting community, it will develop better networks for child victim care.

The Maldives made a major mistake by not providing proper support for victims of CSA, which stands in the way of an effective response to this problem. The Maldives needs to establish complete support systems that address the specific requirements of child victims alongside their families to generate better recovery results. The key to preventing child suffering from occurring in silence requires community workshops and supportive cultural development to teach people about the victim's care needs. When victim support receives proper attention through the child protection framework, vulnerable children will gain the strength to recover from abuse.

5.3.2.9 Challenges in Policy Development

The development process of policies stands as a significant impediment that prevents efficient action against CSA in the Maldives, including several reasons, such as (but not limited to) data limitations hindering policy design, fragmentation and conflicting stakeholder interests, sociocultural barriers to dialogue and implementation, insufficient political will and resource commitment, and governance and implementation challenges. Effective child abuse prevention policies face significant obstacles because insufficient data exists about CSA frequency and characteristics throughout the nation. When policymakers lack accurate data, they struggle to understand the needs of at-risk groups and to determine which interventions are most effective in addressing them. A lack of information leads to substandard policies that fail to address the core problems of abuse and do not adequately support child protection efforts (Letourneau et al., 2016; National Children's Alliance, 2024; Petersen, Joseph, & Feit, 2014; WHO, 2024). Developing evidence-based interventions for CSA prevention requires systematic research and continuous data collection about this issue.

A significant obstacle arises when multiple parties with diverse aims become involved in policy development. The policy development process faces fragmentation because different agencies, including government institutions, NGOs, community groups, and child welfare defenders, maintain separate priorities and goals (Cullen et al., 2024; Nen & Astbury, 2011; Noll, 2021; Pinheiro, 2006; UNICEF, 2024). Other

groups with rival objectives redirect the primary goal toward effective CSA prevention. When developing policies, stakeholders should initiate discussions to reach consensus on child protection strategies. The participation of all necessary parties during collaboration drives the development of unified policies with a stronger focus on child defence measures.

The development of CSA policies becomes more challenging due to social and cultural factors. The Maldivian society maintains rigid cultural norms about sexual abuse, which prevent essential dialogue from happening, thus blocking advancement in this matter. Chainsaws to address sensitive topics can pose difficulties for policymakers in crafting effective child protection mechanisms. A positive community environment supporting child protection develops when people understand its value through active discussions. The direct involvement of community members in this dialogue process will create trust while demonstrating that children's welfare should be the top priority (Centre of Expertise on Child Sexual Abuse, 2022a; Centre of Expertise on Child Sexual Abuse, 2022b; Daro & Dodge, 2009; Engelmann, Weirich, & May-Chahal, 2025; Guastaferrero et al., 2019; Kwhali et al., 2016; Russell, Higgins & Posso, 2020; Wurtele, 2008).

National-level support, including political commitment, is essential for developing effective policies. Government officials must prioritise child protection, which requires adequate funding to execute proven child welfare programs. Rising and falling political commitments create barriers affecting the reliability and effectiveness of child welfare policies. Voltage Advocacy programs, run by civil society groups and grassroots efforts, should prioritise child protection while prompting officials to make policy changes. Participation in child rights advocacy, alongside efforts to acquire financial resources and modify policies, leads to the development of more effective protective measures for children (Letourneau et al., 2016; Slemaker et al., 2021; UNICEF, 2020).

The policy obstacles to CSA protection in the Maldives require multiple solutions to establish adequate child safeguards. The Maldives can establish comprehensive CSA policies by enhancing data-collection methods, promoting stakeholder participation, incorporating sociocultural considerations, and maintaining sustained advocacy. Developing policies through combined efforts and comprehensive information will help safeguard children while establishing safety measures for the entire youth population nationwide.

5.3.2.10 Call for Continuous Improvement

A call for continuous improvement is essential in the Maldives' approach to addressing CSA, including several reasons, such as (but not limited to) systemic fragmentation and unclear responsibilities, resistance to change and slow adaptation, resource limitations and capacity gaps, policy and accountability shortcomings, and knowledge transfer and professional development gaps. The Maldives must maintain steady progress in its efforts to address CSA. The battle to shield children from abuse remains a constant effort because society changes, thus necessitating adjustments to all protective measures. Continuous improvement requires systematic assessments that identify opportunities to improve existing policies, current practices, and support systems. The iterative method represents a key requirement for addressing new social changes while understanding how the needs of abused children evolve (McNeish, Kelly, & Scott, 2019; Ministry of Health Malaysia, 2009; Vera-Gray, 2023). The Maldives' commitment to continuous improvement will establish a protective framework that effectively responds to the diverse challenges of CSA.

Continuous improvement benefits from implementing strong systems that monitor and evaluate operations. Collecting data on CSA, intervention success rates, and case outcomes provides valuable insights to improve overall child protection strategies (Nikku & Azman, 2014; Parkinson & Sullivan, 2019). A careful review of current policies and their performance enables stakeholders to make more informed funding decisions. The Maldives can refine its strategy to address weak areas by analysing data trends and assessing stakeholder input to develop a more comprehensive approach to combating CSA.

The child protection field requires stakeholders to build a collaborative learning platform for continuous improvement across all departments. Networks involving government bodies, NGOs, community groups, and local leaders create opportunities to exchange valuable information from past activities (Lu et al., 2020; UNICEF, 2021; UNICEF New York, 2020). Periodic stakeholder meetings that analyse problems, highlight accomplishments, and generate innovative ideas will establish a community dedicated to development and flexibility. Programs that combine sectors enhance service-delivery efficiency, enabling organisations to create well-rounded initiatives that respond effectively to CSA situations.

Staff working in child protection must receive professional development programs that directly contribute to ongoing improvement efforts. All child welfare professionals must maintain up-to-date knowledge of current research findings and practice standards, as well as techniques that help children recover from trauma (McNeish, Kelly, & Scott, 2019; Nickerson et al., 2021; Rudolph et al., 2017; Solehati et al., 2023). The workforce responds better to CSA complexities because consistent training and capacity-building initiatives delivered to social workers, law enforcement personnel, educators, and healthcare providers create professional competency. Educating professionals in abuse prevention demonstrates that fighting CSA depends on committed practitioners who have complete knowledge of effective prevention methods.

The Maldives requires ongoing improvement initiatives to develop more effective strategies to address CSA. The country can enhance its child protection framework by implementing systematic evaluation systems, fostering stakeholder alliances, offering targeted training programs, and adopting flexible approaches to addressing evolving needs. The country's commitment to ongoing development ensures both persistent vigilance against child abuse attacks and full support for all children to protect their rights and well-being effectively.

5.3.2.11 Judicial Process Issues

Lastly, ongoing evaluation and reform of the judicial processes themselves are essential for addressing systemic issues that contribute to the challenges faced by child victims of sexual abuse, including several reasons, such as (but not limited to) system inefficiencies and lack of ongoing evaluation, fragmented inter-agency coordination, cultural and societal barriers, resource and capacity constraints, lack of child-focused practices and transparency, dependency on reforms and best-practice adoption and need for victim-centered communication. System effectiveness requires evaluating case durations, legal judgments, and stakeholder feedback to obtain vital system information. An analysis of CSA case data using research methods can reveal how the judicial system handles such cases. This leads to evidence-based reforms that improve the speed and efficiency of judicial dispatch. The evaluation process is strengthened by the involvement of researchers and advocates, thereby advancing evidence-based changes

that protect child victims (Halvorsen et al., 2024; Nen & Astbury, 2011; Parkinson, 2016; Parkinson & Steele, 2024; Russell, Higgins, & Posso, 2020).

Implementing proven best practices from systems that demonstrate excellence in child protection should form the basis of reform programs. The improvements should integrate optimised case management, strengthen inter-agency coordination, and provide comprehensive child-sensitive expertise to all legal staff. The Maldives can build an improved operational legal system that meets the distinctive requirements of child victims by taking active steps regarding judicial process matters. The nation's legal system requires ongoing communication with victims and their families, as well as child protection organisations. This is to build trust as we develop a child-focused model.

To resolve judicial process problems, society must dedicate itself to teaching people about child victim rights within the legal system. The process must include providing information about rights, legal procedures, and support network options (Back, 2012; Centre of Expertise on Child Sexual Abuse, 2022a; Choong, 2021; ECPAT International, 2017; Mansoor et al., 2022; McGill & McElvaney, 2022; Wangamati et al., 2019). Public education about the judicial process empowers family members to utilise the system more effectively, which increases their capacity to report CSA cases. Increased community awareness of victims' rights increases the odds of addressing improper delays in case handling or mistreatment.

Addressing all complexities of the judicial process is essential for the Maldives to deal effectively with CSA cases. The Maldivian judicial system needs key reforms involving court specialisations, better legal expert training programs, family victim transparency, and regular evaluation systems to deliver efficient child abuse justice. The Maldives should direct its legal system toward children's needs. This approach will secure prompt justice for victims and foster a safe environment for all children.

5.3.2.12 Need for Community Involvement

The Maldives requires urgent community involvement in CSA prevention, as unified efforts are necessary to create safe areas for children, including several reasons, such as (but not limited to) education and awareness as foundation, community as first line of defense, strengthening local surveillance and safety, support networks and access to services, reduction of silence and stigma, collaboration with NGOs and government. The community is the primary defender against abuse by serving in prevention tasks

and identifying and reporting unusual activities. Many local communities do not grasp CSA warning signals and the procedures for reporting such incidents. Education and awareness initiatives targeting community members help establish their ability to recognise signs of abuse and initiate protective measures for children (Ministry of Health Malaysia, 2009; UNICEF, 2014; Washington State Department of Children, Youth, and Families, 2025). A heightened community responsibility will help the Maldives develop stronger local surveillance against child exploitation. It fosters favorable safety conditions for children.

Moreover, community involvement fosters stronger networks of support for child victims and their families. Members of support groups, along with community organisations, establish safe spaces where victims can openly discuss their experiences and access resources without fear of persecution or discrimination (Kopp, 2008; Lu et al., 2020; Melton & McLeigh, 2020; United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2017). Initiated programs provide emotional support and practical assistance by helping families access legal services and mental health facilities, enabling advocates to secure the necessary interventions. Support from communities for victims, along with their families, enhances anti-victimisation messaging and protects children from enduring silence. A stronger community support network will emerge through partnerships between NGOs and government agencies, creating a comprehensive system to address CSA.

The perception of child protection significantly improves when community leaders from religious backgrounds combine with their local counterparts. Respected community members who endorse child rights messaging enhance its reach, fostering a broader understanding and increasing the uptake of child protection initiatives (Gilligan, 2009; Kamaruddin, 2010; Melton & McLeigh, 2020; UNICEF, 2012; Wessells, 2015). Community leaders contribute to cultural mindset changes, which might presently contribute to the silent environment regarding child abuse cases. Such a partnership will protect families from judgment and enable parents to report abuse incidents while sparking meaningful dialogues about child safety measures, which establish safer conditions for children.

Nonprofit community projects focused on youth education and advocacy work together as strong tools for engaging community members (Daro & Dodge, 2009; Scott et al., 2006). The future development of a prevention-oriented support culture depends on enabling young people to report abuse cases while sharing personal stories during

awareness initiatives. Child involvement in child protection work helps establish a new generation that uses the knowledge acquired to protect their peers from abuse.

Building strong community participation to combat CSA remains essential to developing a comprehensive child protection strategy in the Maldives. Protecting vulnerable community members is possible through awareness-raising, the creation of support networks, public leaders' involvement, and youth empowerment. A well-developed community-based approach enhances immediate CSA responses and fosters responsible accountability throughout the community, thereby protecting all children.

5.3.3 Effective Approaches for Addressing Child Sexual Abuse (CSA) in the Maldives (Research Objective 3): Recommendation of this Study

CSA remains a critical issue in the Maldives, necessitating immediate attention and the development of comprehensive strategies to protect vulnerable populations. Given the alarming rates of abuse and its profound impact on children, families, and communities, it is imperative to explore and implement effective approaches that can significantly mitigate this societal challenge. The Maldivian government and various stakeholders have recognised the urgency of establishing robust frameworks encompassing preventive measures, responsive interventions, and supportive services for victims. By examining these multifaceted approaches, this section aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of current initiatives in the Maldives, their effectiveness, and areas requiring further strengthening to ensure a safer environment for all children.

5.3.3.1 Enhancing Awareness and Training

An effective CSA approach in the Maldives needs awareness development and training as its fundamental components. The role of education is central to preventing abuse and identifying warning signs. This is because it gives everyone, from parents and educators to healthcare providers and the public, the power to intervene when abuse is suspected. Implementing extensive awareness initiatives that educate different population groups will help build widespread child safety monitoring practices in the community (Crosson-Tower, 2003; Guastaferrero et al., 2024; Lee, 2023; Scholes et al., 2012; Sigad et al., 2024; Solehati et al., 2023; Walsh & Brandon, 2011; Xu, Fu & Yang, 2024). The initiatives must include information about children's rights, together with

the effects of abuse and the value of reporting suspicious activities. An informed public will help the Maldives build a society that focuses on child protection above all else.

Direct personnel who deliver child-related services must receive training about CSA to improve their detection and support capabilities. All workers who deal with children need specialised training, which includes identifying abuse symptoms together with the proper way to handle disclosures of abuse. Staff education must teach proper abuse identification alongside methods to support the emotional requirements of child victims during and after experiences of abuse. This approach enables professionals to provide emergency support for children and establish communication channels for those who would otherwise avoid seeking help (Centre of Expertise on Child Sexual Abuse, 2022a; Ministry of Children and Family Development, 2017; Seshadri & Ramaswamy, 2018; Vera-Grey, 2023). Scheduled educational sessions maintain these professionals' competency by delivering the latest information on child protection protocols.

It is essential for programs to start education initiatives that teach both parents and guardians about recognising child abuse symptoms, alongside teaching them protective communication methods for their children. Various informational workshops should help participants discuss personal safety techniques and explore consent standards and how to establish boundaries for children. The knowledge, equality, and communication skills provided to families will enable them to protect their children and ethically advocate for their rights. Student involvement with their families will boost parental safeguarding roles. Thus, creating stronger community-based child protection networks (Centre of Expertise on Child Sexual Abuse, 2022b; Gerber, 2023; Holloway & Pulido, 2018; Martin et al., 2014; UNICEF East Asia and the Pacific Regional Office, 2020; Xu, Fu & Yang, 2024).

The participation of youth members is essential to the awareness campaign's work. Children and adolescents can become effective promoters who educate their classmates about CSA in both school and community settings. Proper teaching on consent boundaries and reporting systems in educational curricula provides children with ways to recognise abuse and understand their fundamental rights (Fix et al., 2023; Letourneau et al., 2016). Academic programs that teach young people to stand against abuse help them become better supportive peers by building their sense of accountability. When young people participate in advocacy efforts, they gain independence and help create a safe environment that fosters every child's success.

CSA prevention in the Maldives heavily depends on better awareness programs and training initiatives. The Maldives should establish extensive educational programs and youth engagement initiatives. This is to defend against child abuse through educational campaigns for communities and professionals, and training programs for families and students. Societies that receive accurate information will have a stronger ability to detect and prevent CSA, thereby protecting all children.

5.3.3.2 Resource Allocation and Infrastructure

Resource allocation and infrastructure are vital components of an effective response to CSA in the Maldives. Adequate financial backing from child protection agencies, schools, and community organisations will enable them to conduct successful programs and provide services (Ferragut et al., 2023; McNeish, Kelly, & Scott, 2019; Letourneau et al., 2016). These include increased investment in infrastructure, such as secure reporting channels, specialized law enforcement units, and accessible child protection facilities, which strengthen the Maldives' capacity to protect vulnerable children and deliver timely interventions. Investments also create a framework for ground-based professionals to acquire the necessary instruments and training and to receive the support needed to prevent and respond to abuse. The Maldives will build protective strengths for vulnerable children and provide comprehensive family support when it dedicates adequate Budgets to child protection activities.

The allocation of vital resources demands the strategic development of facilities specifically for child protection. Safe shelters for child abuse victims, such as crisis centres and rehabilitation programs, should be designed to be child-friendly (Choong, 2021; Kewley, Mhlanga-Gunda, & Van Hout, 2021; Parkinson & Steele, 2024). These facilities require staff with the appropriate qualifications to provide psychological support, counselling, legal assistance, and educational resources to survivors. Children who receive supportive services in a protected setting tend to experience healing alongside recovery of their emotional stability.

Efforts to obtain technology that enables better reporting and streamlines communication between child protection institutions would lead to higher service standards. Victims and community members can easily access confidential help and report incidents through digital reporting mechanisms and dedicated hotlines for abuse reports (United Nations Human Rights, 2024; van der Spuy et al., 2024). Centralised

tracking databases help different agencies work together, allowing them to execute prompt investigations and complete case analyses. The Maldives should utilise technology to allocate resources more efficiently. Thereby, optimising their response against CSA.

All staff working in child protection operations must participate in standardised educational programs and advanced skill development. Continual professional education, including training workshops, seminars, and funding, provides workers with access to contemporary child protection methods, legal requirements, and best practices (Sharp-Jeffs, Coy, & Kelly, 2017; Solehati et al., 2023; Walsh et al., 2022). A competitive benefits package and fair pay for child welfare professionals help ensure the recruitment and retention of a qualified workforce. Properly trained professionals form the essential foundation for delivering excellent services to child abuse victims.

The Maldives requires effective resource allocation and infrastructure development as primary tools to combat cases of CSA. Thus, the Maldives should establish an effective protective system for children by strategically investing in customised facilities, adopting technology, supporting continuous professional development, and increasing remuneration for child protection staff. Committed resource allocation will emerge as a catalyst for meaningful change and the well-being of every child across the nation.

5.3.3.3 Long-term Strategy and Evaluation

Creating a sustained strategy to combat CSA is the foundation for developing an effective framework across the Maldives. For instance, a sustained strategy to combat CSA should serve as the foundation for a comprehensive framework in the Maldives, establishing an integrated system for victim prevention alongside intervention services and family support to ensure consistent, evidence-based practices across all child-protection actors. Widespread policies must incorporate evidence-based methods to ensure that all entities serving children consistently apply these practices (Breiner, Ford, & Gadsden, 2016). The long-term strategy must prioritise continuous education for every actor involved in child protection work, as well as ongoing professional development programs. The government of the Maldives should direct its efforts toward maintaining permanent education programs for law enforcement

officials, social workers, and educational staff members on the latest best practices and policies that protect children from abuse and neglect.

Monitoring and evaluating data collection methods are essential to a long-term strategy, as they enable programs and initiatives to be assessed effectively. Implementing key performance indicators (KPIs) allows organisations to evaluate measurable outcomes for achieving child protection framework goals (Cruz et al., 2020). The programs will remain relevant through periodic evaluations and audit cycles that address new community requirements, emerging trends, and obstacles. Authorities use evidence to develop policies and programs that effectively serve the conditions encountered by children at risk. The participation of victims and their families during evaluation activities facilitates an authentic assessment of intervention success, enabling a more accurate identification of essential modification requirements (Bagnato et al., 2014).

Any sustainable plan for child protection work needs community engagement as its fundamental element. By allowing families and community members to participate in discussions and decision-making actively, and to initiate safety-related programs, the community fosters a sense of responsibility for protecting children (Gottschalk & Borhan, 2023; Hamalainen, Pihlainen, & Vornanen, 2020; Wessells, 2018; Woodman, Roche, & McArthur, 2023). The strength of child protection increases when families receive educational programs that teach both child rights awareness and abuse prevention measures, as well as available support options. Community members who receive education about their duties to advocate for children's protection will generate an environment that actively engages residents with serious preventive measures. The active involvement of communities within the long-term strategy will build an educated, proactive community that takes the prevention of CSA seriously (Daro & Dodge, 2009).

The assessment process of updating the long-term child protection strategy remains essential for stakeholders to make informed adjustments in response to shifting circumstances. An effective long-term child protection strategy requires continuous transformation capability to respond to evolving environmental challenges (Petersen, Joseph, & Feit, 2014; IMICEF, 2021b). Stakeholders benefit from periodic strategy evaluations, which enable them to assess performance levels, identify areas for improvement, and implement necessary changes to the plan. Review processes must evaluate performance results and incorporate stakeholder and neighbourhood input. The

comprehensive strategy will be grounded in a strategic, evidence-led evaluation process, incorporating collaboration with academic institutions, child advocacy organisations, and government agencies.

A lasting, effective, and long-term strategy to manage CSA in the Maldives requires evidence-based practices, data evaluation, and community engagement, followed by continuous adaptation to evolving demands. Such foundational principles will ensure that the Maldives maintains sustainable and comprehensive solutions for CSA protection while acknowledging evolving threats against its vulnerable children. An organisation-wide commitment to continuous improvement through child protection initiatives will lead to improved safety outcomes and increased empowerment for children across all national territories.

5.3.3.4 Legal Framework and Reforms

Establishing a robust legal framework and implementing necessary reforms are crucial to effectively addressing CSA in the Maldives. Child protection laws exist in the Maldives. However, further assessments and updates are required to establish a complete legal framework with clear definitions and applicability to contemporary issues. For instance, a clear definition of CSA terminology will lead to consistent case-management procedures between law enforcement and the judiciary. Regularly assessed offender punishment levels must be used to determine appropriate consequences for abusers, as they help maintain the seriousness of child protection rules.

The legal system requires stakeholder participation to strengthen its framework. Working with child advocacy organisations, survivors of abuse, and legal experts produces valuable information about better law creation and policy development. The involvement of these stakeholders throughout legislative reform enables the correct reflection of the actual challenges faced by children and families who experience abuse. Effective solutions for CSA develop best through a collaborative approach that brings together diverse perspectives from all stakeholders (Adam, Ahmad & Kassim, 2024; Centre of Expertise on Child Sexual Abuse, 2022b; Cody, Bovarnick & Soares, 2024; National Children's Alliance, 2024).

The legal framework requires active threat identification methods to keep pace with emerging risks, such as online abuse. The evolution of technology, coupled with

the emergence of new abuse methods, necessitates updating laws to address existing risks effectively. Protecting children from modern security threats requires authorities to enact digital safety legislation, establish online reporting channels, and enforce sanctions against cybercriminals. The Maldives' continuous legal framework updates and monitoring will maintain its protective power over children.

Specialised units focused on child welfare should be established within police forces and judicial institutions to strengthen the application of laws protecting children. Specialised professional units must be established to manage sensitive cases involving children, equipped with all essential resources to ensure proper care of their needs (Choong, 2021; Lorenzana et al., 2024; Seshadri & Ramaswamy, 2018; UNICEF, 2020). The probability of successful criminal prosecution increases through specialised offerings and an environmental focus on child safety, while victims are protected within the legal system.

The Maldives must develop an effective legal system and continue implementing reforms that align with new crime patterns to address CSA effectively. A massive improvement in child protection efforts in the Maldives will result from ongoing legislative reviews, stakeholder participation, the establishment of a specialised unit, and recognition of emerging challenges. A robust legal framework is essential to protect the rights of children residing in the Maldives and to ensure they receive proper care.

5.3.3.5 Enhancing Inter-Agency Collaboration

Enhancing interagency collaboration is vital to creating a cohesive, effective framework for addressing CSA in the Maldives. For instance, various entities, including law enforcement agencies, social services, healthcare providers, and educational institutions, must collaborate on child protection efforts because the issue is multifaceted. Service gaps will arise when these agencies fail to work together effectively, resulting in delayed responses that harm vulnerable children (ECPAT, INTERPOL, & UNICEF, 2022; Slemaker et al., 2021; Vrolijk-Bosschaart et al., 2018). All agencies involved in child protection cases must establish dedicated systems to facilitate efficient communication and promote unified cooperation. Conducting simultaneous training events that connect all agencies enables participants to learn about their roles, fostering mutual teamwork and leading to more effective responses for

vulnerable children. The Maldives must develop collaborative spaces to create a focused strategy that both protects children and treats child abuse completely.

Formal agreements, such as memoranda of understanding, between agencies will enhance the clarity of roles and responsibilities related to child protection. The formal agreements create a solidified organisational commitment to joint projects and define how organisations should collaborate on information exchange and operational collaboration. Establishing clear guidelines helps different agencies maintain aligned objectives, thereby reducing the risk of confusion and miscommunication when handling delicate cases (Gonzalez, Mirabal, & McCall, 2025; Lalayants, 2008; Petersen, Joseph, & Feit, 2014; WHO, 2006). The scheduled joint case review sessions provide stakeholders with essential tools to evaluate their collaboration, identify obstacles, and exchange best practices. Initiative-driven coordination among agencies yields advanced approaches that raise child protection service standards, enabling victims to receive prompt, coordinated assistance.

Multiple agencies collaborate to deliver outreach programs, including community education initiatives. Joint awareness campaigns launched by different agencies result in stronger outreach, enabling them to combine their resources and specialised knowledge. Extended community programs that provide training to families about the recognition of child abuse and reporting procedures, as well as available assistance groups, will enable people to act appropriately (Adam, Ahmad & Kassim, 2024; McNeish, Kelly & Scott, 2019; UNICEF East Asia and the Pacific Regional Office, 2020). Established partnerships between agencies for child safety promotion result in enhanced community monitoring capabilities and a society that prioritises child welfare. Obtaining community feedback on child protection strategies promotes community participation and results in solutions tailored to the specific needs of the local population.

Utilising modern technology provides enhanced opportunities for different agencies to collaborate during child protection operations. Installing databases that enable secure information sharing between agencies will lead to faster and more organised case management practices (Bentley, 2018; Powell & Casey, 2021; UNICEF East Asia and the Pacific Regional Office, 2020). Stakeholders gain greater control over effective partnership coordination by viewing live data, including reported cases, referral details, and intervention progress. Professional training in using communication technology platforms will enhance collaborative practices and facilitate unified action

against child abuse. The Maldives can enhance its operational child protection systems by leveraging technology to enable inter-agency collaboration.

Enhancing inter-agency collaboration requires formal communication structures, treaty agreements, combined resources for community outreach, technological implementation, and a shared team-based workplace culture among stakeholders (ASEAN Commission on the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Women and Children, 2021; Green et al., 2015; Lalayants, 2008). All relevant agencies in the Maldives can achieve unified objectives by developing coordinated approaches to child protection work. Better outcomes for children at risk emerge when different agencies join forces, enhancing the protection of all vulnerable members of society.

5.3.3.6 Building Public Trust in Child Protection Systems

For children in the Maldives to receive the protection they need, public trust in their child protection systems must develop to gain adequate community support and safeguard children. For instance, public confidence in child protective systems depends strongly on institutional transparency, a commitment to accountability, and a proven priority for childcare. Child protection agencies will earn greater community trust by prioritizing transparency in their processes. Child protection agencies should present regular outcome reports, including case investigation data, achievements, and any problems encountered. Collaboration between public communities during discussions of policies, practices, and outcomes helps build community spirit toward improved child protection efforts (Adam, Ahmad & Kassim, 2024; International Society for the Prevention of Child Abuse & Neglect, 2024; Nikku & Azman, 2014; Slemaker et al., 2021).

The joint involvement of local organisations and community leaders strengthens trust between the public and child protection agencies. General community members build strong confidence in child safety systems by observing familiar members advocating for child protection (Adam, Ahmad & Kassim, 2024; Daro & Dodge, 2009; UNICEF, 2021; WHO, 2024). Educating community leaders through protection training enhances their capacity to promote awareness of children's rights. This enables them to understand the responsibilities of stakeholders in protecting children. Child protection systems foster relationships that establish grassroots networks, effectively addressing community needs and concerns. Community members should actively

participate in initiatives to strengthen institutional-citizen collaboration, thereby improving child protection strategies.

The public gains greater trust through awareness efforts that educate about CSA detection and the importance of reporting such incidents. Families gain the power to protect their children through educational programs that identify signs of abuse and teach how to report and where to access services (Celik, 2024; Choong, 2021; Guastaferrero et al., 2020; Guastaferrero et al., 2019; Kopp, 2008; Rudolph et al., 2017). Understanding the child protection system and the resources available to families helps them view these services as partners in child safety. Community-based programs must take measures to reduce the fear of judgment, which inhibits people from reporting abusive situations. People with informed knowledge about child protection systems will support these systems and protect children's rights through positive interactions.

Survivors need to share their experiences with protection systems in community conversations so the process becomes more transparent to the public and its weaknesses are identified. Testimonial platforms that enable victims and their families to share their stories effectively demonstrate the importance of proper intervention protocols and foster public sympathy (Centre of Expertise on Child Sexual Abuse, 2022a; Halvorsen, Solberg, & Hjelen Stige, 2020; McElvaney et al., 2021; Warrington et al., 2023). Authority figures should present achievements in the child protection system while highlighting current difficulties. So, society experiences a simultaneous sense of responsibility and urgency to contribute to the solution. The public tends to become more dedicated to child advocacy support services when they experience firsthand the effect of their involvement.

The public sector should promote operational transparency to build public confidence in child protection services and involve communities in delivering awareness programs and supporting survivors in sharing their experiences. Such strategic initiatives enable the Maldives to establish an environment that gives people confidence to protect children. Establishing strong public trust enhances community involvement in child protection, fosters collective responsibility for preventing CSA, and provides safe environments for all children.

5.3.3.7 *Systemic Challenges and Accountability*

Addressing systemic challenges and strengthening accountability in child protection are crucial to a comprehensive response to CSA in the Maldives. For instance, child protection interventions are more effective when bureaucratic systems demonstrate cooperation between departments and their agencies. The absence of smooth communication between organisations creates problems, including improper case handling and duplicate services. This problem can lead to failures in meeting victim support deadlines. Developing a communications structure that effectively connects different agencies is crucial for efficient operational processes (Allnock, Lloyd, & Pearce, 2017; Dovi et al., 2022; Parkinson & Steele, 2024; UNICEF, 2024). A suitable framework should schedule recurring meetings between social service workers and representatives from law enforcement and healthcare institutions. This is to examine current case assessments and the effectiveness of implemented interventions. The implementation of inter-agency collaboration enables agencies to resolve systemic problems, which, therefore, enhances their response to child abuse scenarios.

Public trust in child protection services requires a proper system for holding those responsible for service delivery accountable. Preventing CSA depends on having complete operational visibility and transparency into results. So, individuals participating in this work will be held responsible for their actions. Routine evaluations and audits of child protection agencies can help identify areas for improvement and demonstrate their commitment to child safety (Azzopardi, 2022; Fix et al., 2023; Rudolph et al., 2017; UNICEF, 2021). Each assessment must review case-handling procedures, intervention success rates, and the standard of support service delivery to victims. Such accountability systems help create an organisational environment where employees demonstrate diligence and personal responsibility, upholding ethical standards to protect the child protection system's reputation.

The perspective of victims and their families should be included to establish an effective feedback process. Staff members affected by CSA should be permitted to describe their experiences to generate essential knowledge about systemic improvement needs. By organising community forums alongside surveys and controlled discussions, the victims, along with their families, obtain chances to present their opinions about finding better solutions for child abuse cases (Alaggia, Collin-Vezina & Lateef, 2017;

Latzman, Casanueva & Dolan, 2017; McPherson et al., 2025; Parkinson & Steele, 2024). The Maldives' enhancement of child protection effectiveness will result from actively gathering and implementing such feedback into its policies and procedures, aligning them with community requirements. The system achieves substantial improvements when professionals dedicate themselves to listening carefully to abuse victims along with their families.

Systemic issues necessitate training and capacity enhancement programs for law enforcement, social services, and judicial personnel. CSA prevention programs and intervention techniques must be taught to all professionals who require these essential skills and knowledge through continuous training. The psychological characteristics of children who experience abuse enable more compassionate and proficient responses to allegations of abuse. Regularly scheduled training programs should deliver updates on legislative changes and policy modifications, ensuring experts remain prepared to perform their duties (Alaggia, Collin-Vezina, & Lateef, 2017; Lu et al., 2022; Rudolph et al., 2017). The Maldives can develop a more capable and responsive child protection system through continuous access to educational resources for its personnel.

Implementing multidisciplinary approaches within CSA investigations fosters better collaboration and holds departments across sectors accountable to one another. The formation of teams that combine law enforcement officers with social workers, mental health professionals, and educators creates a comprehensive examination process. This unified assessment process enables the delivery of comprehensive evaluation and response strategies from multiple professional viewpoints (Dovi et al., 2022; Slemaker et al., 2021). Establishing regular case review meetings allows team members to exchange knowledge, which helps them identify purpose-made interventions tailored to children's specific needs. The coordination of healthcare professionals enables efficient care delivery and enhances team accountability by making the outcomes of their interventions collective. When multiple team members come together, responses to CSA are better and kinder.

5.3.3.8 Strengthening the Implementation of Laws and Regulations

Implementing laws is vital for achieving effective CSA prevention in the Maldives. For instance, children's protection in the Maldives relies heavily on law enforcement, as the country has established comprehensive legislation to protect

children. Enhancing collaboration among law enforcement agencies, social services, and judicial departments ensures better enforcement of child protection laws. Through harmonious interactions, agency cooperation facilitates faster investigations, leading to more effective legal proceedings and a greater potential to prosecute offenders. Furthermore, it is vital to conduct periodic assessments of how implementation procedures function and to establish mutual interagency collaboration systems (Choong, 2021; ECPAT, INTERPOL, & UNICEF, 2022; European Commission, 2022; Nen & Astbury, 2011). Authorities must evaluate the implementation of laws to identify areas for improvement, so they can implement corrective measures that enhance compliance and thereby adequately protect children.

Nonetheless, implementing these laws requires substantial public awareness efforts directed at the police force and the judiciary. Training sessions were created to teach child protection legislation and provide essential competence to child case workers. Before participating in child protection matters, adults must receive specific training regarding safety measures children are entitled to, along with detailed information about consequences that occur when they fail to react to possible child abuse or neglect incidents (Alaggia, Collin-Vezina & Lateef, 2017; Collin-Vezina, Daigneault & Hebert, 2013; Mansoor et al., 2022; Russell, Higgins, & Posso, 2020; UNICEF, 2020). Equipping employees with the knowledge is essential to maintaining an accountable workforce and responding promptly to child protection matters. Training that maintains consistency encourages staff members to adopt compassionate communication with victims, enabling them to respect victims' rights throughout the legal process.

Much-needed improvements in the implementation of laws and regulations require establishing transparent systems that facilitate the reporting of violations. People who have experienced abuse, together with their families and the community, should have complete freedom to report their suspicions of mistreatment without facing danger. A combination of confidential hotline services, secure reporting channels, and accessible resources will facilitate better community reporting of child abuse (Boyana & Khau, 2025; Collin-Vezina, Daigneault, & Hebert, 2013; Latzman, Casanueva, & Dolan, 2017; UNICEF, 2024). Public education regarding these resources enables a better understanding of abuse reporting requirements and the enforcement of accountability against abusers. The Maldives can promptly address reported cases of

CSA by supporting reporting mechanisms and providing necessary victim protection and appropriate support.

Expanded funding for child protection facilities supports the effective implementation of relevant laws. Law enforcement agencies must create specialised units staffed by professionals with both experience and sensitivity to handle child protection matters (ECPAT, INTERPOL, & UNICEF, 2022; Nen & Astbury, 2011; Nikku & Azman, 2014; UNICEF, 2020). Implementing these units depends on having sufficient operational support through proper training, funding, and psychological evaluations. Agencies that receive adequate resources to handle child-related criminal offences increase the chances of successful prosecutions, thus reducing child abuse cases.

CSA legislation in the Maldives requires extensive support through inter-agency teamwork, continuous training programs, established reporting channels, and sufficient operational funds. The Maldives can establish child safety by enforcing protective laws and providing professionals who understand child protection regulations and are prepared to respond to child abuse situations.

5.3.3.9 Addressing Evidence and Procedural Challenges

Addressing evidentiary and procedural challenges is essential to effectively managing CSA cases in the Maldives. For instance, gathered evidence within sensitive cases involving child victims often becomes difficult to preserve and present in court because of the complexities that occur throughout the investigation procedure, mainly when children function as main witnesses. Child victims struggle to communicate their experienced trauma because of their developmental stage or reactions to fear or trauma, which prevents proper evidence collection. It is essential to establish evidence-based standards for collecting evidence that promote child-sensitive practices, aligning with best practice guidelines (Abdul Latiff et al., 2023; Centre of Expertise on Child Sexual Abuse, 2022a; McElvaney et al., 2021). Teaching law enforcement personnel, healthcare professionals, and social workers how to conduct appropriate interviews with children leads to the collection of accurate evidence and a reduction in child suffering. The approach to handling children's emotional states yields higher-quality evidence, thereby enhancing successful legal outcomes.

Review and possible modifications to the legislative system governing the admission of evidence require attention to improve its effectiveness. As a reform measure in CSA cases, the admission of expert opinions from child psychologists or trauma specialists, along with other relevant evidence, is common (Helpingstine et al., 2023; Kewley, Mhlanga-Gunda & Van Hout, 2021; Otterman et al., 2024; Wiley, 2009). Multiple evidence sources help legal proceedings demonstrate complex conditions present in these cases. Thus, enabling a thorough examination of the circumstances. A system of legal provisions enabling videoconferencing for witness testimony should be established. This is to protect child victim statements and decrease intimidation levels during legal proceedings.

The judicial process for CSA cases involves examining procedural obstacles that lead to excessive waiting times. The prolonged nature of legal proceedings generates adverse effects on abuse victims and their loved ones, as the protracted uncertainty and elevated trauma affect them. A distinct system of child protection courts should exist to reduce the duration of child abuse investigation procedures. Judges and legal personnel specialising in adolescent cases must comprise these courts. This type of specialised court operates on a child-focused methodology to produce prompt solutions along with sustained care for child victims of sexual abuse (Parkinson, 2016).

Another essential procedural challenge is helping families through legal procedures related to CSA. The courtroom system presents numerous challenges that can be overwhelming for many families as they navigate its complexities. Families gain the strength to support their children through legal assistance programs, counselling support, and educational materials by defending their rights and addressing their needs. Families will experience reduced anxiety when understanding the judicial process, leading them to work effectively with statutory agencies.

A combination of methods targeting child-friendly evidence collection, legislative change, dedicated courts, and specific support for family structures is necessary to address procedural and evidentiary obstacles in cases of CSA. The Maldives should allocate resources to address these key elements, thereby enhancing its capacity to conduct thorough investigations and prosecutions of CSA cases. The legal system should adapt its operations to meet the needs of child victims, as this dual approach protects vulnerable parties and compassionately provides efficient justice services.

5.3.3.10 Community and Youth Involvement

The effective solution for handling CSA in the Maldives depends on the thorough involvement of the community and young people. For instance, children's protection programs achieve greater success through community participation, which enhances monitoring and fosters public accountability. Such active participation enables individuals and families to protect their children in their neighbourhoods while building an advocacy-based culture of support for children's rights. Local community initiatives help people gain a better understanding of CSA, its effects, and the necessary actions to prevent it and report incidents (International Save the Children Alliance, 2008; Kopp, 2008; Rudolph et al., 2023; Schneider & Hirsch, 2018; UNICEF, 2021). When communities adopt the responsibility to protect their children, the Maldives will enhance its efforts to combat abuse more effectively.

CSA prevention requires direct endorsement from youth activists nationwide. Youth possess distinctive viewpoints that enable them to be effective supporters of their peers. Student participation in educational prevention efforts, consent lessons, and protective initiative activities helps develop youth ownership toward abuse prevention (Kopp, 2008; Letourneau et al., 2016; Rudolph et al., 2017; Solehati et al., 2023). The Maldives should create youth-oriented platforms to allow young people to engage in meaningful discussions about child protection, while providing victims with opportunities to report their experiences. These initiatives impart valuable lessons about respect, empathy, and solidarity, while also fostering a culture that prioritises child safety among youth.

The involvement of communities promotes the creation of support networks that assist children who face endangerment and their victim peers. Parent-teacher associations, community support groups, and youth leadership initiatives form networks that deliver vital support and resources to families affected by CSA (Crosson-Tower, 2003; Jin et al., 2017; Parkinson & Steele, 2024). Such groups serve as gathering points for discussions about child rights and community safety concerns, while promoting preventive strategies. Children receive ample protective support, and families gain the capability to protect their children through teamwork.

The early recognition of child abuse signs requires members of the community to receive training and a comprehensive understanding of proper reporting procedures.

Community input tools and supporting resources will establish a proactive environment that enables people to intervene during suspected incidents (Truong, 2025; Walsh et al., 2022). Community training sessions provide essential knowledge, enabling participants to offer appropriate and compassionate support during incidents of abuse. Enhanced community awareness of such issues leads to earlier responses, which, in turn, secure children's well-being.

The Maldives needs community members and youth to actively engage in developing comprehensive solutions to address CSA across the region. The Maldives will establish an accountable protection environment for children through community awareness programs, youth advocacy participation, the development of local support systems, and training sessions. Targeted collective action by communities effectively protects children. Thus, decreasing abuse incidents throughout the youth population.

5.4 Findings (Research Objectives 1, 2, and 3) and Theories (Institutional Theory, Ecological Systems Theory, and Social Learning Theory)

This section discusses the findings for all three research objectives and their relationships to the underpinning theories in this study: Institutional Theory, Ecological Systems Theory, and Social Learning Theory.

5.4.1 Existing Measures to Address Child Sexual Abuse (CSA) in the Maldives (Research Objective 1) and Theories

5.4.1.1 *Institutional Theory*

The fourteen findings largely align with Institutional Theory, which emphasizes how formal structures, laws, policies, and organizational norms shape behavior within a society. The findings represent a setting in which formal institutions, policy mandates, and policy ecologies shape actors' behavior. Recurring calls for enforcement, updates to the law, and formal organizations suggest pressures for compliance and legitimacy that are central to Institutional Theory. The relatively modest counts of public involvement and community engagement, although present, may reflect partial institutional uptake and possible breakdowns in the spread of norms and routines across non-state actors and local practices. A domain for which the theory would anticipate much more widespread, socially embedded institutionalization.

5.4.1.2 Ecological Systems Theory

Ecological Systems Theory posits that child development and protection are influenced by multiple nested systems (microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem) interacting across levels. The findings span multiple levels: enforcement, guidelines, and Act implementation (macro- and exosystem through laws and institutions); workforce and resource gaps (mesosystem linking institutions to service providers); and community engagement (microsystem dynamics). Findings such as public and community engagement, awareness-raising, and infrastructure development indicate how macrosystem and exosystem factors contribute to local working practices; on the other hand, delays in legal processes and internal protocols reflect factors that impact service delivery at meso- or micro-levels. Taken together, the variety of levers presented across agency mandates, procedures and community touchpoints lend themselves to a conclusion that CSA protection is alternatively (or in addition) best depicted as being mediated through interaction processes among systems; Challenging problems would emerge thereby more from significant friction or misalignment rather than less between such systems (e.g., sizable gaps between policy design and community practices; between legal reform and on-the-ground service capacity).

5.4.1.3 Social Learning Theory

Social Learning Theory emphasizes learning through observation, imitation, modeling, and reinforcement within social contexts. Those awareness/education campaigns, public involvement, or ongoing improvement of laws can be seen as platforms upon which a process of social learning would take place—the former as an educational campaign model, protective expectation, and the latter where guidelines and routines provide observed standards for professional practice. Institutions and enforcement also generate normative rewards or sanctions that influence behavior, boosting pro-protection actions by professionals, families, and communities. On the other hand, workforce gaps and resource limitations may hamper effective modeling and reinforcement, thereby undermining the theory's prediction that observed practices become internalized as practice. If online CSA prevention and reporting are becoming more visible and rewarded (e.g., through positive outcomes and survivor feedback), this would reinforce Social Learning Theory by normalising protective norms in communities.

5.4.2 Challenges in Addressing Child Sexual Abuse (CSA) in the Maldives (Research Objective 2) and Theories

5.4.2.1 Institutional Theory

The findings highlight structural and procedural aspects that Institutional Theory would classify as dependencies on formal rules, norms, and organizational structures. Problems such as policy and law implementation gaps, legal process delays, and resource shortfalls illustrate how institutions can influence behavior through established rules, resource allocation patterns, and bureaucratic rewards. When awareness and training are ignored, or infrastructure is insufficient, institutions may not institutionalize the policy but rather demonstrate a lack of synergy between policy intentions and organizational realities. The continual exhortations for better governance and good enough government imply that the legitimacy and stability of institutions depend on systematic enforcement, accountability, and responsive adjustment. Collectively, these data show that institutional strengthening, bureaucracy streamlining, and sustained funding are needed if 'practice is to meet policy ambition' in combating CSA.

5.4.2.2 Ecological Systems Theory

Ecological Systems Theory emphasizes multiple, interacting contextual layers (microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem) that influence behavior and outcomes. The findings demonstrate challenges across several layers. At the microsystem level, lack of awareness, training, and victim support directly affects children, families, and frontline workers. At the mesosystem level, it is evident that implementation and policy design challenges, as well as cross-agency inconsistencies, characterise how families, schools, health, and justice systems are likely to interact effectively. Exosystem and macrosystem elements are reflected in resource limitations, institutional momentum, and higher-level policy development concerns that limit the extent to which local actors can respond. The call for community participation corresponds to strengthening inhibitory processes at the microsystem or mesosystem levels, while slow legal procedures and inadequate frameworks reflect systemic obstructions at higher levels. Collectively, these findings are consistent with Ecological Theory in that interlocking systems determine CSA responses at various levels.

5.4.2.3 Social Learning Theory

Social Learning Theory focuses on imitative learning, modeling, and reinforcement within social contexts. Several findings indicate that observed practices, norms, and training influence CSA responses. Lack of awareness and training, implementation gaps, and institutional inertia suggest that inadequate modeling of proper procedures and inconsistent reinforcement of best practices lead to suboptimal outcomes. Delays in legal processes and neglect of victim support may reflect learned attitudes about priorities or institutional efficacy. The call for ongoing improvement and community participation suggests that positive change can result when constructive exemplars, mentorship, and feedback loops are grounded in action, so that key frontline workers, policymakers, and communities can see, mimic, and reinforce protective actions. In summary, the findings support Social Learning Theory, which emphasizes effective role modeling, training and skill-building, reinforcement of norms, and opportunities for viewers in the system to try new approaches.

5.4.3 Effective Approaches for Addressing Child Sexual Abuse (CSA) in the Maldives (Research Objective 3) and Theories

5.4.3.1 Institutional Theory

The findings generally support Institutional Theory, which emphasizes the role of formal structures, rules, norms, and legitimacy in shaping organizational behavior. The findings suggest that strong institutions, explicit mandates, and accountable governance matter. As awareness, training, and transparency increased, institutions gained credibility, and compliance spread across agencies. However, some systemic and accountability findings indicate that institutions may still be subject to path dependencies, enforcement failures, or limited resource mobilization at both the local and state levels, where formal structures can create entrenched path dependencies, resulting in a lack of capacity for sustained change. In general, the data suggest that increasing the effectiveness of formal institutions and converging interests and norms across agencies are crucial for sustained success against CSA in the Maldives.

5.4.3.2 Ecological Systems Theory

Ecological Systems Theory posits that child development and protection are shaped by multiple interdependent environmental systems, from macroscale policies to family dynamics and community resources. The findings accentuate this interdependence: awareness and education permeate the microsystems involving families and schools; multi-agency co-operation on resourcing corresponds with exosystem and mesosystem interactions; community and youth consultation is related to the macrosystem condition of cultural values and structure of rules; as well as long-term planning and review reflect how systems adapt over time. Some findings point to gaps at different levels—societal trust, community involvement, and infrastructure—suggesting that reforms in one system (local laws) will need to be combined with reforms in local norms and contexts (school settings). This alignment indicates that a multi-level, interdependent system is needed to successfully prevent CSA.

5.4.3.3 Social Learning Theory

Social Learning Theory holds that people learn through observation, modeling, reinforcement, and social norms. The findings, which are enhancing awareness and training, community and youth involvement, and building public trust, align with this framework by showing how training programs and public campaigns can shape knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors; positive role models within institutions and communities can reinforce protective practices; and feedback loops can reinforce correct conduct while guiding adjustments based on outcomes. Instead, the focus on interagency cooperation and transparent accountability works because organizational culture and norms influence behaviour through informal social sanctions and shared understandings of acceptable behaviour. Obstacles may emerge if training or campaigns fail to translate into changes in behavior, or if system-level barriers, such as a lack of resources or inconsistent adherence, prevent the reinforcement of motivated behavior. In summary, the findings support the idea that learning mechanisms in social contexts play an important role in preventing and intervening in CSA.

5.5 Monitoring, Audits, Feedback Mechanisms, and Adaptive Response to Online Child Sexual Abuse (CSA) Framework

While the previous chapter and earlier sections in this chapter discuss general issues related to CSA, Table 5.1 highlights a specific framework for monitoring, audits, feedback mechanisms, and adaptive responses to online CSA. This study believes that it is crucial, as online abuse poses unique and fast-paced challenges that are distinct from those associated with offline CSA. The digital space allows perpetrators to cross borders into victim populations, lose their trail by hiding behind encrypted communication, and expand their reach through social media platforms. A focused framework would ensure that online incidents are detected and reported promptly, and that effective data sharing and privacy protections are in place across all relevant agencies. That swift coordination with digital platforms and cyber units is achieved. It also encourages continued learning and adaptation to new online trends, such as live streams, deepfakes, and encrypted messaging, by establishing clear indicators, accountability mechanisms, and feedback loops that translate survivors' experiences into concrete policy and practice changes.

By placing online CSA within its own framework, policymakers can allocate resources where they believe they are most important, measure online-specific outcomes, and implement progressive prevention and intervention planning that can adapt to technological change.

Table 5.1

Framework for Monitoring, Audits, Feedback Mechanisms, and Adaptive Response to Online Child Sexual Abuse (CSA)

Area	Key Elements / Focus	Suggested Indicators or Activities	Potential Data Sources / Actors
Monitoring the implementation of laws and programs for new problems (online CSA)	Governance and accountability	Establish a national coordinating body Publish annual accountability reports	Government ministries, law enforcement, judiciary, social services, and education
	Indicators and data sources	Process indicators (time-to-report, time-to-investigation, case disposition, training coverage, resource allocation) Outcome indicators (reporting rates, prosecution rates, victim safety, service uptake)	Police records, social services case files, CPIS, health records (where permissible), school reports, court records
	Data systems and interoperability	Centralized secure Child Protection Information System (CPIS) Unique case identifiers Interoperability across agencies	IT/departments, data governance boards
	Data quality and ethics	Data quality checks Privacy-preserving data sharing Consent and trauma-informed data handling	Data quality teams, ethics boards

	Real-time monitoring capabilities	Live dashboards for KPIs Regional trends Resource use	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • National monitors, agency data stewards
Regular audits for new problems (online CSA)	Cadence and scope Audit domains	Quarterly internal process audits Annual external audits by independent bodies Compliance with reporting procedures Timeliness Data integrity Inter-agency collaboration Safeguarding of victims	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Internal auditors, universities, NGOs, international partners • Audit checklists • Interviews with frontline staff and survivors (where appropriate)
	Methodology	Mixed methods: quantitative indicators and qualitative interviews	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Audit teams, survivor representatives (with consent)
	Findings dissemination	Concise audit briefs Actionable recommendations Closed-loop follow-up	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Audit reports • Policy teams
	Risk-based auditing	Prioritize online exploitation Cross-border cases Rural areas	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Risk registers • Incident logs

	Transparency and learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Public summaries • Repository of lessons learned 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Public portals • Knowledge management systems
Feedback loops to new problems (online CSA)	Survivor and family input	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Anonymous feedback channels • Survivor advisory panels 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hotlines, online portals, community forums; survivor representatives
	Frontline worker feedback	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regular debriefs, after-action reviews, staff surveys 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Frontline teams, supervisors
	Community and partner engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quarterly multi-stakeholder forums 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NGOs, community leaders, educators, faith groups
	Feedback integration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Formal process to translate feedback into actions with owners and timelines 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Policy and program teams
	Feedback quality assurance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Triangulation of feedback with data and outcomes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Data analysts, program evaluators
Mechanisms to adapt to new problems (online CSA)	Digital monitoring and indicators	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Online CSA indicators (online grooming, exploitative content, livestream abuse) • Platform takedown rates 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CPIS, cybercrime units, platform partners
	Rapid-response protocols	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Online CSA rapid-response unit • Escalation paths; cross-border cooperation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • National coordinating body • Police cyber units
	Partnerships with digital platforms	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • MOUs with platforms for reporting, content removal, and safety features 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Platform policy teams • Telecom providers

Capacity building for online contexts	Training on cybercrime laws, digital evidence, and privacy-preserving interviewing	• Training institutes, judiciary, law enforcement
Legal and policy alignment	Regular reviews to address livestreamed abuse, deepfakes, encrypted communications Clear evidence standards	Legislative bodies Prosecutors Judges
Community digital literacy	Public campaigns on online safety, reporting, consent Age-appropriate materials	Schools Libraries Media Civil society
Technology-enabled detection and prevention	• Pilot AI-assisted monitoring with privacy safeguards • Risk-scoring for early intervention	Tech partners Data teams
Evaluation of online interventions	• Metrics for online interventions: content removal time, platform cooperation speed, cybercrime unit response	Audit teams Platform analytics

5.6 Implications of this Study

The implications of this study can be discussed under three headings: practical, theoretical, and policy.

5.6.1 Practical Implications

This study offered several practical implications for stakeholders involved in addressing CSA in the Maldives. Firstly, by inventorying existing interventions and best practices implemented by governmental and non-governmental organisations, this study provided insight into successful interventions that can be further articulated or implemented in local contexts. Agencies can use these findings to develop more effective programs that serve specific populations, engage communities more effectively, and deliver prevention efforts. This study also identified the obstacles these parties encountered in responding to CSA to inform capacity-building needs. Organisations might develop tailored interventions to address these barriers by identifying the factors that limit successful implementation. That is, by recognising the specific resource constraints, lack of training, and procedural clutter that inhibit enhanced use. Above all, it was hoped that this study would promote interaction between the state and NGO sectors, enabling a more coordinated response to CSA and leveraging the relative strengths of each.

5.6.2 Theoretical Implications

This study made a significant contribution to the theoretical understanding of CSA by applying Institutional Theory, Ecological Systems Theory, and Social Learning Theory. Institutional Theory posits that institutions are crucial in shaping society's behaviours, practices, and policies. The findings revealed that robust institutional mechanisms are necessary for effective CSA management, as they foster accountability and governance. This study aligned with the core premise of this theory by examining how the Maldives' government and NGOs implemented measures to address CSA. It illustrated the influence of existing legislations, policies, and institutional support systems on the efficacy of CSA responses. Identified gaps in these frameworks highlighted the need for continued development and reform, emphasising how weak or poorly enforced legislation could hinder progress. This framework examined how

deficiencies in laws and governance structures contributed to ongoing challenges for stakeholders, enabling an evaluation of the government's capacity to adapt and strengthen institutional support systems.

Ecological Systems Theory, as outlined by Urie Bronfenbrenner, provides a comprehensive lens for understanding the multifaceted influences on child development, particularly in relation to CSA. This study highlighted how various environmental systems interact to shape children's experiences and vulnerabilities. It explored the immediate contexts of children within relationships (microsystems) and the links between these contexts (mesosystems), such as how families and schools promote resilience against CSA. Wider systems outside the family (exosystems) and cultural factors within society (macrosystems) were considered, as well as how community resources and prevailing societal traditions affected the prevention and intervention of CSA. Utilising this theory, this study emphasised the importance of addressing individual, relational, and contextual factors in developing effective child protection strategies.

Social Learning Theory posits that individuals learn behaviours through observation and imitation within their social environments. This study illustrated how societal attitudes and responses to CSA are shaped through social modelling. Insights from this study suggest that if the government and NGOs effectively demonstrate positive behaviours—such as healthy family dynamics and appropriate responses to abuse—community members may be more inclined to adopt and replicate these behaviours. Conversely, cultural norms and stigmas surrounding CSA can hinder learning and positive action, perpetuating cycles of abuse. This informed stakeholders on how to create environments conducive to open dialogue and learning, which are necessary for effective CSA prevention and response.

5.6.3 Policy Implications

The findings of this study held critical policy implications, particularly regarding the Child Rights Protection Act (Act No. 19/2019) and the Special Provisions to Deal with Child Sex Abuse Offenders (Law No. 12/2009). This study examines existing measures and their effectiveness regarding the Child Rights Protection Act (Act No. 19/2019). This study informed policymakers about the practical application of this Act. Insights from this study helped identify legislative gaps and ensure alignment with

the realities organisations face on the ground. Policymakers could leverage this information to refine the Act, enhancing its applicability and effectiveness in protecting children's rights. This study's exploration of challenges faced by government and NGOs in addressing CSA prompted a re-evaluation of the Special Provisions to Deal with Child Sex Abuse Offenders (Law No. 12/2009). It highlighted systemic barriers that hinder effective prosecution and offender rehabilitation, emphasising the need to amend the legal framework to achieve better outcomes in tackling CSA.

5.7 Limitations of this Study and Suggestions for Future Studies

The first limitation of this study is the lack of longitudinal data, which hinders the ability to track changes over time. The effectiveness of this study is diminished because it lacks a time-tested framework for evaluating how measures combat CSA across different periods. This major limitation prevents researchers from analysing the enduring effects of interventions, as they cannot determine the long-term success of victim relief programs and community benefits. The brief assessment approach may lead to inaccurate perceptions of the success rates of applied tactics at individual observation points. Follow-up studies that track participants across different developmental stages are necessary to determine how interventions and CSA responses persist overtime. This study design enables scientists to monitor the evolution of public opinion and the success rates of educational programs while tracking progress in social mindfulness. This approach will enable professionals to develop dual reactive and proactive strategies to create enduring, effective remedies.

The second limitation of this study is its insufficient consideration of political factors that can significantly shape the landscape of CSA policies and their implementation. The political environment influences the funding stream, the policy enforcement strategy, and the advocacy efforts that are essential to developing effective CSA combat measures. Understanding political factors proves essential in policy development, as policies without this knowledge often yield incomplete findings. New studies are needed to investigate the political conditions surrounding the CSA in the Maldives. Researchers can uncover the obstacles and catalysts to the ineffective implementation of interventions by examining policy structures shaped by public support, government commitments, and political advocacy. The systematic assessment will guide policymakers in creating laws that not only adhere to existing best practices

but also address challenging political environments associated with abuse and trafficking, ultimately leading to stronger, more sustainable solutions across the board.

The third limitation of this study is the potential lack of cultural sensitivity concerning the various cultural factors that shape attitudes toward addressing and reporting CSA. Every cultural group maintains special beliefs, rules, and prohibitions that powerfully influence how its members handle abuse issues within their community. Failure to consider cultural dimensions results in two types of risk: interventions may not connect with the target population, leading to low participation, or complete service rejection may occur. This study effort may unintentionally promote misinterpretations of local environments from external perspectives. Future research should investigate cultural beliefs alongside practices, as these factors significantly influence CSA reporting behaviours and intervention outcomes. The development of cultural sensitivity in research methods depends on how well researchers work with local communities to understand their cultural foundations. This will boost community trust in reporting systems and increase the effectiveness of assistance programs serving their target audiences.

5.8 Conclusion

This study has meticulously examined the critical issue of CSA in the Maldives, focusing on the roles of the government and NGOs in combating this grave social problem. The investigation into existing measures (RO 1) reveals that gaps persist while the Maldivian government and NGOs have made notable progress in formulating policies and initiating programs to address the issue. This study indicates that the Maldivian government, in collaboration with non-governmental organisations, has advanced policy development and program implementation to address CSA. It reports the adoption of guidelines and procedures to standardise case handling, robust enforcement of protective laws and policies, and legislative amendments that reinforce the child-protection legal framework. Additionally, internal organisational protocols have been developed to streamline responses to incidents of abuse.

Public involvement and community engagement have been encouraged to foster a collective commitment to safeguarding children. Ongoing awareness and education initiatives aim to inform the public about CSA and the resources available to its victims. However, pressing issues regarding workforce and resource gaps impede the

effectiveness of these measures. NGOs have made strides in developing child protection facilities, providing victims with the necessary support and safe spaces.

Monitoring and evaluating implementation practices are crucial to determining the effectiveness of the measures. Moreover, addressing legal gaps and challenges remains a priority to ensure that laws adequately protect children. Establishing institutions under the Child Rights Protection Act (Act No. 19/2019) has been a positive step toward creating a more focused approach to juvenile justice. Implementing the Child Protection Act marks a significant advancement in the legal framework for child protection. However, persistent delays in legal processes hinder timely justice for victims. Finally, there is a need for a continuous review and improvement of laws and regulations to adapt to evolving challenges and enhance the protection of children in the Maldives.

However, despite implementing these proactive measures, the Maldives also faces critical challenges (RO 2) that hinder progress in addressing CSA. There are significant implementation gaps in the policies and laws aimed at protecting children from abuse. A lack of awareness and training among key stakeholders further complicates efforts to address this issue. Resource limitations, including inadequate funding and personnel shortages, hinder the effectiveness of interventions. Additionally, delays in the legal process can discourage victims from seeking justice. Inadequate facilities and support systems are also prevalent, leaving many victims without essential care. The existing legal framework is often ineffective, resulting in unresolved cases and inadequate protection for victims. Furthermore, there is a pressing need for increased community involvement to create a supportive environment for victims. Challenges in policy development continue to hinder progress, leading to the neglect of crucial victim support services. Institutional challenges and inertia impede timely action and responsive measures. Lastly, there is a continuous call for improvement in the judicial process to ensure justice is served efficiently and effectively.

In addition, this study delineates effective approaches to tackling CSA in the Maldives (RO 3). The participants indicated that there is a crucial need for strengthening the implementation of laws and regulations to ensure adequate protection for children against sexual abuse in the Maldives. Enhancing awareness and training programs for professionals and the general public is essential to foster a deeper understanding of the issue and its implications. Adequate resource allocation and infrastructure development

are vital to supporting initiatives to combat CSA. Community and youth involvement foster an environment where children feel safe and heard. Comprehensive legal frameworks and ongoing reforms are necessary to address gaps in existing child protection laws. It is essential to address systemic challenges and hold those responsible for enforcing child protection measures accountable. Enhancing inter-agency collaboration can improve coordination, enabling a more unified response to cases of CSA. Addressing evidence and procedural challenges must be prioritised to facilitate smoother judicial processes. Building public trust in child protection systems will encourage reporting and seeking help for victims of abuse. Ultimately, implementing a long-term strategy with regular evaluations will enable the adaptation and improvement of CSA prevention and response approaches, ensuring sustained progress in safeguarding children.

In conclusion, eradicating CSA in the Maldives demands ongoing commitment and collaboration from government bodies and NGOs. Eliminating CSA in the Maldives requires implementing prevention measures alongside education programs and supportive services. The Maldives must establish child well-being as its priority so the nation can build an abuse-free environment with proper child protection. Future success in ending the sexual abuse of children will depend on researching effective practices, collaborative policy development, and community participation, leading to a future in which no child has to endure abuse while gaining opportunities to thrive.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1

Approval Letter from UiTM Research Ethics Committee

UNIVERSITI
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MARA

Fejabat
Timbalan Naib Caiselor
(Penyelidikan dan Inovasi)

Reference : SOO-TNCPI (5/1/6)
Our reference : REC/06/2023 (PG/MR/190)
Date : 7 June 2023

Professor Dr Yarina binti Ahmad
(Ameena Adam - 2020878744)
Faculty of Administrative Science & Policy Studies
Universiti Teknologi MARA
40450 Shah Alam
SELANGOR

Dear Professor Dr Yarina,

APPROVAL LETTER - UiTM RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE

Thank you for submitting your research proposal to the Research Ethics Committee (REC). After considering your application, the Committee approved your proposal titled 'Examining the Roles of Government and Non-Governmental Organisations in Addressing Child Sexual Abuse Issues in Maldives (Penelitian Peranan Kerajaan dan Organisasi Bukan Kerajaan dalam Menangani Isu Penderaan Seksual Kanak-kanak di Maldives)' in Male', Republic of Maldives.

Details of the approval are as follows;

Ref. number:	REC/06/2023 (PG/MR/190)
Approval Period:	7 June 2023 until 30 April 2024
Authorised personnel:	1 Professor Dr Yarina binti Ahmad 2. Ameena Adam

The UiTM Research Ethics Committee operates in accordance to the ICH Good Clinical Practice Guidelines, Malaysian Good Clinical Practice Guidelines and the Declaration of Helsinki. The approval of this project is conditional upon your continuing compliance with these guidelines and declaration

We draw your attention to the requirement that a report on this research, must be submitted every 12 months from the date of the approval or on the completion of the project, whichever occurs first. Failure to submit reports will result in withdrawal of consent for the project to proceed. Amendments, if any, to the study documents are to be submitted to the REC for approval.

If you require further information, please contact the REC Secretariat at 03-55448069/03-55442794 or email at recsecretariat@uitm.edu.my.

Yours sincerely,

EMERITUS PROFESSOR DR RAYMOND AZMAN ALI
Chairman
UiTM Research Ethics Committee

c.c: Dean, Faculty of Administrative Science & Policy Studies, UiTM

Universiti Teknologi MARA
Aras 3, Bangunari Wawasan
40450 Shah Alam, Selangor, MALAYSIA
Tel: (+603) 5544 20M/2255
Faks: (+603) 5544 1070

B TM M *
Iskandar Sultan
UiTM

APPENDIX 2

Appointment Letter of the Language Expert for the Research Instrument



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OurRef: 500-FSPPP(PT.2 3/4/1)
Date : 30th August 2023

Dr. Fathimath Muna
Senior Lecturer
Faculty of Education
Islamic University of the Maldives

Dear Sir,

APPOINTMENT AS LANGUAGE EXPERT FOR THE RESEARCH INSTRUMENT

The above matter refers.

Name : AmeenaAdam
Student ID : 2020878744 (AM990)
Research Area : Administrative Science
Research Title : Examining The Role of Government And Non-Government Organisations In Addressing Child Sexual Abuse Issues In Maldives
Supervisors : 1) Pro! Dr Yarina Ahmad (Main supervisor)
2) Dr. Asiyah Kassim (Co-supervisor)

We are pleased to appoint you as the language expert for the research instrument for the above-mentioned researcher. Your expertise is highly valuable to ensure the validity and quality of the research instrument.

Attached herewith, please find the related documents for your kind perusal.

Please contact the researcher at 79032120 or email at amna2912@gmail.com should there be any further clarification needed.

Your assistance and cooperation on this matter is highly appreciated.

Thank you.

Yours faithfully.

DRr ASIYAH KASSIM
Head of Postgraduate Studies

Cc:
1) Main Supervisor, Prof. Dr Yarina Ahmad
2) Researcher, Ameena Adam

Fakulti Sains Pendidikan dan Pengajian
Universiti Teknologi MARA
Cawangan Negeri Sembilan
Kampus Seiumban
Persiaran Sereban Tiga/1, Seremban 3
70300 Seremban Negeri Sembilan MALAYSIA
Tel: (+60) 42424242; Faks: (+60) 42424242



APPENDIX 3

Data Collection Application Letter from the Faculty of Administrative Science and Policy Studies

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OurRef : 100-FSPPP (PT. 3077)
Date : V June 2023

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

Dear Sr,

APPLICATION TO AUTHORIZE DATA COLLECTION FOR THE PURPOSE OF RESEARCH STUDY {DOCTORAL DEGREE PROGRAMME}

This is to confirm that Ameena Adam with an ID: 2020878744 is a postgraduate student currently pursuing Doctor of Philosophy (Administrative Science) at the Faculty of Administrative Science & Policy Studies. Universiti Teknologi MARA. Malaysia.

In partial of the requirements for the above Doctoral Degree, the student needs to complete the thesis titled "Examining The Role Of Government Organizations And Non-Government Organizations In Addressing Child Abuse Issues In Maldives". All information given will be treated in the strictest confidence and will be used for academic purposes only.

Your cooperation in authorizing the above students request to gather the required data at your esteemed organization is highly appreciated.

Thank you.

Yours faithfully.

DftrtfSTYAH KASSIM
Head of Graduate Studies

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APPENDIX 4

Participant Information Sheet

REC 4/2019/BI Rev. 2 (2020)

Research Ethics Committee
Research Management Centre
Universiti Teknologi MARA
40450 SHAH ALAM
Tel: 03 - 5544-8069. Fax: 03 - 5544-2096/2767



Participant Information Sheet

Research Title

Examining the Roles of Government and Non-Governmental Organisations in addressing Child Sexual Abuse issues in Maldives.

Introduction of Research

This study aims to examine the roles of the government and non-governmental organizations in addressing the child sexual abuse issue in Maldives. This study is limited to child sexual abuse only. The reasons for selecting child sexual abuse issue are due to the number of cases that increase each year. The victims of CSA experience a lot of risks in their development in mental and physical health condition. Therefore, it's very much important that the government and non-government organisations provide effective services for the victims of CSA. This study will focus on the roles of the Maldives' government and non-governmental organizations in dealing with the issues of child sexual abuse. Among the selected government agencies are Ministry of Gender Family and Social Service, Maldives Police Service, Children's Right Commission, Children's Ombudsperson's Office and Indira Gandhi Memorial Hospital (IGMH). For the non-governmental agencies, the focus is on the NGO Advocating Rights of Children (ARC). The data collection for this study will involve qualitative approach, including in-depth interviews as one of the research strategies. Among the reason for this is that the participants, they offer more flexibility and richness in information as they are the experts in this area. This study adopted institutional theory to explain how they can utilise this theory in their working environment and together they could bring a positive outcome to the community when handling child sexual abuse issues in Maldives.

Purpose of Research

This study aims to examine the measures undertaken by the Maldivian government and non-governmental organisations in dealing with child sexual abuse issues and also to explore issues and challenges that they face in dealing such issues. Furthermore, also to determine approaches for the Maldivian government to address the child sexual abuse issues effectively.

Participant Information Sheet (cont.)

REC 4/2019/BI Rev. 2 (2020)

Research Procedure

The semi-structured method was selected in this study, since it can guide the interview process by providing standard questions and creating a comfortable flow of communication during the interaction between the participant and the researcher. A semi-structured interview is an interview that is conducted based on an interview guide that has a set of general questions and signified questions. Therefore, in this study, the participants will be asked questions according to the interview guide, whereby they will be asked general questions such as their background and eligibility, followed by significant questions.

Participation in Research

Your participation in this research is entirely voluntary. You may refuse to take part in the study, or you may withdraw yourself from participation in the research at any time without penalty.

Benefit of Research

Information obtained from this research will benefit the individuals, researchers, institution and community for the advancement of knowledge and future practice.

Research Risk

There will be no risk involved in this study.

Confidentiality

Your information will be kept confidential by the investigators and will not be made public unless disclosure is required by law.

APPENDIX 5

Consent Form 1

Note: Representative identities will not be fully disclosed.

REC 4/2019/BI Rev. 2 (2020)

Consent Form¹

To become a participant in the research, you or your legal guardian are required to sign this Consent Form.

I herewith confirm that I have met the requirement of age and am capable of acting on Dene of myself / as² a legal guardian as follows:

1. I understand the nature and scope of the research being undertaken
2. I have read and understood all the terms and conditions of my participation
3. kTmTSuestions relating to this research and my participatton therein have been answered to my satisfaction. nmeedures and to
4. I voluntarily agree to take part in this research, to follow the study procedures provide all necessary information to the investigators as " W J J J ^
5. I may at any time choose to withdraw from this research w ^ g g £ ^ n * o m . reason.
6. I have received a copy of the Participant ^ ^ ^ S S S T S M of the
7. Except for damages resulting from negligent o' m f " ^ J J J researchers researcher(s), I hereby release and discharge ^ ^ ^ ^ S S L a o n . ' agree from all liability associated with, arising out * " " ^ ^ S by me due to my to hold them harmless from any harm or loss that may be incurrea y participation in the research.

Name of Participant/Legally authorized representative (LAR)	Signature
I.C No	Date 29.10.2023
Name of Witness ³	Signature
I.C No	Date
Name of Consent Taker	Signature
I.C No	Date

k h- rrtiined by the Principal Investigator.

¹ Original signed copy is to be retained oy

² Detefe whichever is not applicable

* Witness is only required for oral consent.

APPENDIX 6

Consent Form 2

Note: Representative identities will not be fully disclosed.

REC 4/2019/BI Rev. 2 (2020)

fobecom—i—~r~i——" _____ Consent Form¹

Consent Form¹, 0, 133 # 1, # the research, you or your legal guardian are required to sign this

nf TM ! " ! ! \ 00 n f, r m that, have met, he requirement of age and am capable of acting on behalf of myself / as² a legal guardian as follows:

1. I understand the nature and scope of the research being undertaken.
2. I have read and understood all the terms and conditions of my participation in the research
All my questions relating to this research and my participation therein have been answered to my satisfaction.
I voluntarily agree to take part in this research, to follow the study procedures and to provide all necessary information to the investigators as requested.
5. I may at any time choose to withdraw from this research without giving any reason
6. I have received a copy of the Participant Information Sheet and Consent Form.
7. Except for damages resulting from negligent or malicious conduct of the researcher(s), I hereby release and discharge UiTM and all participating researchers from all liability associated with, arising out of, or related to my participation. I agree to hold them harmless from any harm or loss that may be incurred by me due to my participation in the research.



Name of Participant/Legally authorized representative (LAR)

Signature

I.C.No

Date

OA I± o/j*

Name of Witness³

Signature

I.C.No

Date

Name of Consent Taker

Signature

I.C.No

Date

¹ Original signed copy is to be retained by the Principal Investigator

² Delete whichever is not applicable.

³ A witness is only required for oral consent.

APPENDIX 8

Consent Form 4

Note: Representative identities will not be fully disclosed

REC 4/2019/BI Rev 2 (2020)

To become a participant in the research, you or your legal guardian are required to sign this Consent Form.

I, a U.S.S. citizen, that, have met the requirement of age and am capable of acting on behalf of myself / as a legal guardian as follows:

I understand the nature and scope of the research being undertaken.
I have read and understood all the terms and conditions of my participation in the research.
All my questions relating to this research and my participation therein have been answered to my satisfaction.
I voluntarily agree to take part in this research, to follow the study procedures and to provide all necessary information to the investigators as requested.
I may at any time choose to withdraw from this research without giving any reason.
I have received a copy of the Participant Information Sheet and Consent Form.
Except for damages resulting from negligent or malicious conduct of the researcher(s), I hereby release and discharge UiTM and all participating researchers from all liability associated with, arising out of, or related to my participation. I agree to hold them harmless from any harm or loss that may be incurred by me due to my participation in the research.

Name of Participant/Legally authorized representative (LAR)	Signature
I.C No	Date
Name of Witness ³	Signature
I.C No	Date
Name of Consent Taker	Signature
I.C No	Date

¹ Original signed copy is to be retained by the Principal Investigator.
² Delete whichever is not applicable.
³ A witness is only required for oral consent.

APPENDIX 9

Consent Form 5

Note: Representative identities will not be fully disclosed.

REC 4/2019/B1 Rev. 2 (2020)

Consent Form¹

To become a participant in the research, you or your legal guardian are required to sign this Consent Form.

I herewith confirm that I have met the requirement of age and am capable of acting on behalf of myself / as² a legal guardian as follows:

1. I understand the nature and scope of the research being undertaken.
2. I have read and understood all the terms and conditions of my participation in the research.
3. All my questions relating to this research and my participation therein have been answered to my satisfaction.
4. I voluntarily agree to take part in this research, to follow the study procedures and to provide all necessary information to the investigators as requested
5. I may at any time choose to withdraw from this research without giving any reason.
6. I have received a copy of the Participant Information Sheet and Consent Form.
7. Except for damages resulting from negligent or malicious conduct of the researcher(s), I hereby release and discharge UiTM and all participating researchers from all liability associated with, arising out of, or related to my participation. I agree to hold them harmless from any harm or loss that may be incurred by me due to my participation in the research.

Name of Participant/1 Roally authnri7ftrl representative (LAR)	Signature
ICNo ^,m	Date i . 11 . a. <=> Q-3
Name of Witness ³	Signature
ICNo	Date
Name of Consent Taker	Signature
ICNo	Date

¹ Original signed copy is to be retained by the Principal Investigator

² Delete whichever is not applicable

³ A witness is only required for oral consent

APPENDIX 10

Consent Form 6


Note: Representative identities will not be fully disclosed.

Consent Form¹

To become a participant in the research, you or your legal guardian are required to sign this Consent Form.

I herewith confirm that I have met the requirement of age and am capable of acting on behalf of myself / as² a legal guardian as follows:

1. I understand the nature and scope of the research being undertaken.
2. I have read and understood all the terms and conditions of my participation in the research
3. All my questions relating to this research and my participation therein have been answered to my satisfaction.
4. I voluntarily agree to take part in this research, to follow the study procedures and to provide all necessary information to the investigators as requested
5. I may at any time choose to withdraw from this research without giving any reason
6. I have received a copy of the Participant Information Sheet and Consent Form.
7. Except for damages resulting from negligent or malicious conduct of the researcher(s), I hereby release and discharge UTM and all participating researchers from all liability associated with, arising out of, or related to my participation. I agree to hold them harmless from any harm or loss that may be incurred by me due to my participation in the research.

Name of Participant/Legally authorized representative (LAR)	Signature	
I.CNo	Date	^ ///ns2g
Name of Witness ³	Signature	
IC No	Date	
Name of Consent Taker	Signature	
I.CNo	Date	

¹ Original signed copy is to be retained by the Principal Investigator

² Delete whichever is not applicable.

³ A witness is only required for oral consent

APPENDIX 11

Consent Form 7

Note: Representative identities will not be fully disclosed.

Consent Form V _____
To become a participant in the research, you or your legal guardian are required to sign this Consent Form. I herewith confirm that I have met the requirement of age and am capable of acting on behalf of myself / as a legal guardian as follows:

1. I understand the nature and scope of the participation in the research.
2. I have read and understood all the terms and conditions of my participation therein have been answered to my satisfaction.
3. All my questions relating to this research and my participation in the study procedures and to provide all necessary information to the research to follow the study procedures and to
4. I voluntarily agree to take part in this research to the best of my ability giving any reason.
5. I may at any time choose to withdraw from this research with no penalty.
6. I have received a copy of the Participant Information Sheet.
7. Except for damages resulting from negligent or negligent researchers researcher(s), I hereby release and discharge U.T.M. to WSSU. I agree from all liability associated with, J.S.M.S.S.K.L.K by me due to my participation in the research.

Name of Participant/Legally authorized representative (LAR)	Signature
_____	_____
I.C No	Date 28-10-2023
_____	_____
Name of Witness ³	Signature
Ail _____	_____
I.C No	Date 0-10-2021
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Name of Consent Taker	Signature
_____	_____
ICMo	Date
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¹ Original signed copy is to be retained by the Principal Investigator.

² Delete whichever is not applicable

³ A witness is only required for oral consent

APPENDIX 12

Consent Form 8

Note: Representative identities will not be fully disclosed

Consent Form¹

Contttttft³ Participant in the search, you or your legal guardian are required to sign this

I herewith confirm that I have met the requirement of age and am capable of acting on behalf of myself / as² a legal guardian as follows:

- 1 I understand the nature and scope of the research being undertaken.
2. I have read and understood all the terms and conditions of my participation in the research.
- 3 All my questions relating to this research and my participation therein have been answered to my satisfaction.
4. I voluntarily agree to take part in this research, to follow the study procedures and to provide all necessary information to the investigators as requested.
5. I may at any time choose to withdraw from this research without giving any reason.
6. I have received a copy of the Participant Information Sheet and Consent Form.
7. Except for damages resulting from negligent or malicious conduct of the researcher(s), I hereby release and discharge UTM and all participating researchers from all liability associated with, arising out of, or related to my participation. I agree to hold them harmless from any harm or loss that may be incurred by me due to my participation in the research.

Name of Participant/Legally authorized representative (LAR)	Signature
CNo	Date r////?& 13
Name of Witness ³ ^ - J	Signature
CNo	Date <u>rfi/lc-&</u>
Name of Consent Taker	Signature
I.CNo	Date

¹ Original signed copy is to be retained by the Principal Investigator.

² Delete whichever is not applicable

³ A witness is only required for oral consent

APPENDIX 13

Consent Form 9

Note: Representative identities will not be fully disclosed

REC 4/2019/BI Rev. 2 (2020)

Consent Form¹

To become a participant in the research, you or your legal guardian are required to sign this Consent Form.

I herewith confirm that I have met the requirement of age and am capable of acting on behalf of myself / as² a legal guardian as follows:

1. I understand the nature and scope of the research being undertaken.
2. I have read and understood all the terms and conditions of my participation in the research.
3. All my questions relating to this research and my participation therein have been answered to my satisfaction.
4. I voluntarily agree to take part in this research, to follow the study procedures and to provide all necessary information to the investigators as requested
5. I may at any time choose to withdraw from this research without giving any reason
6. I have received a copy of the Participant Information Sheet and Consent Form.
7. Except for damages resulting from negligent or malicious conduct of the researchers, I hereby release and discharge UiTM and all participating researchers from all liability associated with, arising out of, or related to my participation. I agree to hold them harmless from any harm or loss that may be incurred by me due to my participation in the research

Name of Participant/Legally authorized representative (LAR)

Signature

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Name of Witness³

Signature

I.CNo

Date

Name of Consent Taker

Signature

I.CNo

Date

¹ Original signed copy is to be retained by the Principal Investigator.

² Delete whichever is not applicable

³ A witness is only required for oral consent.

APPENDIX 14

Consent Form 10

Note: Representative identities will not be fully disclosed

REC 4/2019/BI Rev. 2 (2020)

Consent Form¹

To become a participant in the research, you or your legal guardian are required to sign this Consent Form.

I herewith confirm that I have met the requirement of age and am capable of acting on behalf of myself / as² a legal guardian as follows:

- 1 I understand the nature and scope of the research being undertaken.
- 2 I have read and understood all the terms and conditions of my participation in the research.
- 3 All my questions relating to this research and my participation therein have been answered to my satisfaction.
- 4 I voluntarily agree to take part in this research, to follow the study procedures and to provide all necessary information to the investigators as requested.
- 5 I may at any time choose to withdraw from this research without giving any reason.
- 6 I have received a copy of the Participant Information Sheet and Consent Form.
7. Except for damages resulting from negligent or malicious conduct of the researcher(s), I hereby release and discharge UiTM and all participating researchers from all liability associated with, arising out of, or related to my participation. I agree to hold them harmless from any harm or loss that may be incurred by me due to my participation in the research.

Name of Participant/Legally authorized representative (LAR)	Signature
I.C.No 41	Date 31- fE>-2e>23
Name of Witness ³	Signature
I.C No	Date
Name of Consent Taker	Signature
ICNo	Date

¹ Original signed copy is to be retained by the Principal Investigator

- Detefe whichever is not applicable

³ A witness is only required for oral consent

APPENDIX 15

Consent Form 11

Note: Representative identities will not be fully disclosed

Consent Form¹

To become a participant in the research, you or your legal guardian are required to sign this Consent Form.

I herewith confirm that I have met the requirement of age and am capable of acting on behalf of myself / as² a legal guardian as follows:

I understand the nature and scope of the research being undertaken.

I have read and understood all the terms and conditions of my participation in the research.

All my questions relating to this research and my participation therein have been answered to my satisfaction.

I voluntarily agree to take part in this research, to follow the study procedures and to provide all necessary information to the investigators as requested.

5. I may at any time choose to withdraw from this research without giving any reason.
6. I have received a copy of the Participant Information Sheet and Consent Form.
7. Except for damages resulting from negligent or malicious conduct of the researcher(s), I hereby release and discharge UiTM and all participating researchers from all liability associated with, arising out of, or related to my participation. I agree to hold them harmless from any harm or loss that may be incurred by me due to my participation in the research.

Name of Participant/Legally authorized representative (LAR)

Signature

I.C No

Date 28/10/2014

Name of Witness³

Signature

I.C No

Date 28/10/2014

Name of Consent Taker

Signature

I.C No

Date

¹ Original signed copy is to be retained by the Principal Investigator.

² Delete whichever is not applicable.

³ A witness is only required for oral consent.

Consent Form 12

Note: Representative identities will not be fully disclosed

Consent Form¹

To become a participant in the research, you or your legal guardian are required to sign this Consent Form.

I herewith confirm that I have met the requirement of age and am capable of acting on behalf of myself / as² a legal guardian as follows:

1. I understand the nature and scope of the research being undertaken.
2. I have read and understood all the terms and conditions of my participation in the research.
3. All my questions relating to this research and my participation therein have been answered to my satisfaction.
4. I voluntarily agree to take part in this research, to follow the study procedures and to provide all necessary information to the investigators as requested.
5. I may at any time choose to withdraw from this research without giving any reason.
6. I have received a copy of the Participant Information Sheet and Consent Form.
7. Except for damages resulting from negligent or malicious conduct of the researcher(s), I hereby release and discharge UiTM and all participating researchers from all liability associated with, arising out of, or related to my participation. I agree to hold them harmless from any harm or loss that may be incurred by me due to my participation in the research.

Name of Participant/Legally authorized representative (LAR)	Signature
I.C No A [redacted]	Date t% / /o / ?*>?>
Name of Witness ³ A [redacted]	Signature
I.C No B [redacted]	Date
Name of Consent Taker	Signature
I.CNo	Date

¹ Original signed copy is to be retained by the Principal Investigator.

² Delete whichever is not applicable.

³ A witness is only required for oral consent.

APPENDIX 17

Consent Form 13

Note: Representative identities will not be fully disclosed

Consent Form¹

To become a participant in the research, you or your legal guardian are required to sign this Consent Form.

I herewith confirm that I have met the requirement of age and am capable of acting on behalf of myself / as² a legal guardian as follows:

1. I understand the nature and scope of the research being undertaken.
2. I have read and understood all the terms and conditions of my participation in the research.
3. All my questions relating to this research and my participation therein have been answered to my satisfaction.
4. I voluntarily agree to take part in this research, to follow the study procedures and to provide all necessary information to the investigators as requested.
5. I may at any time choose to withdraw from this research without giving any reason.
6. I have received a copy of the Participant Information Sheet and Consent Form.
7. Except for damages resulting from negligent or malicious conduct of the researcher(s), I hereby release and discharge UiTM and all participating researchers from all liability associated with, arising out of, or related to my participation. I agree to hold them harmless from any harm or loss that may be incurred by me due to my participation in the research.

Name of Participant/Legally authorized representative (LAR) _____

IC No _____

Signature _____
Date _____

Name of Witness³ _____

Signature _____

IC No _____

Date _____

Name of Consent Taker _____

Signature _____

IC No _____

Date _____

¹ Original signed copy is to be retained by the Principal Investigator.

² Delete whichever is not applicable.

³ A witness is only required for oral consent

APPENDIX 18

Consent Form 14

Note: Representative identities will not be fully disclosed

Consent Form¹

To become a participant in the research, you or your legal guardian are required to sign this Consent Form.

I herewith confirm that I have met the requirement of age and am capable of acting on behalf of myself / as² a legal guardian as follows:

1. I understand the nature and scope of the research being undertaken.
2. I have read and understood all the terms and conditions of my participation in the research.
3. All my questions relating to this research and my participation therein have been answered to my satisfaction.
4. I voluntarily agree to take part in this research, to follow the study procedures and to provide all necessary information to the investigators as requested.
5. I may at any time choose to withdraw from this research without giving any reason.
6. I have received a copy of the Participant Information Sheet and Consent Form.
7. Except for damages resulting from negligent or malicious conduct of the researchers), I hereby release and discharge UiTM and all participating researchers from all liability associated with, arising out of, or related to my participation. I agree to hold them harmless from any harm or loss that may be incurred by me due to my participation in the research.

Name of Participant/Legally authorized representative (U\R)	Signature
I.C No ^ ^	Date {{- { 5 * "LJ>1^
Name of Witness ³ ~	Signature
I.C No	Dale"
Name of Consent Taker	Signature
I.C No	Date

¹Original signed copy is to be retained by the Principal Investigator
Delete whichever is not applicable.

³A witness is only required for oral consent.

APPENDIX 19







Consent Form 15

Note: Representative identities will not be fully disclosed

Consent Form¹

Consent Form¹ for research, you or your legal guardian are required to sign this I herewith confirm that I have met the requirement of age and am capable of acting on behalf of myself / as² a legal guardian as follows:

1. I understand the nature and scope of the research being undertaken.
2. I have read and understood all the terms and conditions of my participation in the research.
All my questions relating to this research and my participation therein have been answered to my satisfaction.
I voluntarily agree to take part in this research, to follow the study procedures and to provide all necessary information to the investigators as requested.
5. I may at any time choose to withdraw from this research without giving any reason.
6. I have received a copy of the Participant Information Sheet and Consent Form.
7. Except for damages resulting from negligent or malicious conduct of the researchers), I hereby release and discharge UFM and all participating researchers from all liability associated with, arising out of, or related to my participation. I agree to hold them harmless from any harm or loss that may be incurred by me due to my participation in the research.

Name of Participant/Legally authorized representative (LAR)	 	Signature
I.C.No		Date 01 October 2022-S
Name of Witness ³	 	Signature 
I.C No		Date 01 October 2022-S
Name of Consent Taker		Signature
I.C.No		Date

¹ Original signed copy is to be retained by the Principal Investigator.

² Delete whichever is not applicable.

³ A witness is only required for oral consent.

APPENDIX 20

Consent Form 16

Note: Representative identities will not be fully disclosed

Consent Form. research, you or your legal guardian **are** required to sign this
of myself /as² aT^g'ua^dTan^s foil^{reqUirement of a9e and am capab,e of ^' " S on behalf}

1. I understand the nature and scope of the research being undertaken.
2. I have read and understood all the terms and conditions of my participation in the research.
3. All my questions relating to this research and my participation therein have been answered to my satisfaction.
4. I voluntarily agree to take part in this research, to follow the study procedures and to provide all necessary information to the investigators as requested.
5. I may at any time choose to withdraw from this research without giving any reason.
6. I have received a copy of the Participant Information Sheet and Consent Form.
7. Except for damages resulting from negligent or malicious conduct of the researcher(s), I hereby release and discharge UiTM and all participating researchers from all liability associated with, arising out of, or related to my participation. I agree to hold them harmless from any harm or loss that may be incurred by me due to my participation in the research.

Name of Participant/Legally authorized representative (LAR)	Signature ¹
I.C No A _ ^ _ ^ _	Date
Name of Witness ³	Signature
C No	Date
Name of Consent Taker	Signature
I.C No	Date

¹ Original signed copy is to be retained by the Principal Investigator.

² Delete whichever is not applicable.

³ A witness is only required for oral consent.

APPENDIX 21

Consent Form 17

Note: Representative identities will not be fully disclosed

Consent Form¹

To become a participant in the research, you or your legal guardian are required to sign this Consent Form.

I herewith confirm that I have met the requirement of age and am capable of acting on behalf of myself/ as² a legal guardian as follows:

1. I understand the nature and scope of the research being undertaken
2. I have read and understood all the terms and conditions of my participation in the research.
3. All my questions relating to this research and my participation therein have been answered to my satisfaction.
4. I voluntarily agree to take part in this research, to follow the study procedures and to provide all necessary information to the investigators as requested.
5. I may at any time choose to withdraw from this research without giving any reason.
6. I have received a copy of the Participant Information Sheet and Consent Form.
7. Except for damages resulting from negligent or malicious conduct of the researcher(s), I hereby release and discharge UiTM and all participating researchers from all liability associated with, arising out of, or related to my participation. I agree to hold them harmless from any harm or loss that may be incurred by me due to my participation in the research.

Name of Participant/Legally authorized representative (LAR)

Signature

I.CNo

Date

Name of Witness³

Signature

I.CNo

Date

Name of Consent Taker

Signature

I.CNo

Date

¹ Original signed copy is to be retained by the Principal Investigator.

² Delete whichever is not applicable

³ A witness is only required for oral consent

APPENDIX 22

Consent Form 18

Note: Representative identities will not be fully disclosed

Consent Form¹

To become a participant in the research, you or your legal guardian are required to sign this Consent Form.

I herewith confirm that I have met the requirement of age and am capable of acting on behalf of myself / as² a legal guardian as follows:

1. I understand the nature and scope of the research being undertaken.
2. I have read and understood all the terms and conditions of my participation in the research.
3. All my questions relating to this research and my participation therein have been answered to my satisfaction.
4. I voluntarily agree to take part in this research, to follow the study procedures and to provide all necessary information to the investigators as requested
5. I may at any time choose to withdraw from this research without giving any reason.
6. I have received a copy of the Participant Information Sheet and Consent Form.
7. Except for damages resulting from negligent or malicious conduct of the researcher(s), I hereby release and discharge UiTM and all participating researchers from all liability associated with, arising out of, or related to my participation. I agree to hold them harmless from any harm or loss that may be incurred by me due to my participation in the research.

Name of Participant/legally authorized representative (LAR)	Signature
I.CNo	Date
Name of Witness ³	Signature
I.CNo	Date
Name of Consent Taker	Signature
I.CNo	Date

¹ Original signed copy is to be retained by the Principal Investigator

² Delete whichever is not applicable

³ A witness is only required for oral consent.

APPENDIX 23

Consent Form 19

Note: Representative identities will not be fully disclosed

Consent Form¹

To become a participant in the research, you or your legal guardian are required to sign this Consent Form.

I herewith confirm that I have met the requirement of age and am capable of acting on behalf of myself / as² a legal guardian as follows:

- 1 I understand the nature and scope of the research being undertaken.
- 2 I have read and understood all the terms and conditions of my participation in the research.
3. All my questions relating to this research and my participation therein have been answered to my satisfaction.
4. I voluntarily agree to take part in this research, to follow the study procedures and to provide all necessary information to the investigators as requested.
- 5 I may at any time choose to withdraw from this research without giving any reason.
6. I have received a copy of the Participant Information Sheet and Consent Form.
- 7 Except for damages resulting from negligent or malicious conduct of the researcher(s), I hereby release and discharge UiTM and all participating researchers from all liability associated with, arising out of, or related to my participation. I agree to hold them harmless from any harm or loss that may be incurred by me due to my participation in the research.

Name of Participant/ Legally authorized representative (LAR)	Signature [^]
IC No <i>t^nw^m^m</i>	Date 2.3-/0-00-3
Name of Witness ³	Signature
I.C No	Date
Name of Consent Taker	Signature
I.C No	Date

¹Original signed copy is to be retained by the Principal Investigator

²Delete whichever is not applicable.

³A witness is only required for oral consent.

APPENDIX 24

Consent Form 20



Note: Representative identities will not be fully disclosed

Consent Form¹

To become a participant in the research, you or your legal guardian are required to sign this

I herewith confirm that I have met the requirement of age and am capable of acting on behalf of myself / as² a legal guardian as follows:

1. I understand the nature and scope of the research being undertaken.
2. I have read and understood all the terms and conditions of my participation in the research.
3. All my questions relating to this research and my participation therein have been answered to my satisfaction.
4. I voluntarily agree to take part in this research, to follow the study procedures and to provide all necessary information to the investigators as requested
5. I may at any time choose to withdraw from this research without giving any reason
6. I have received a copy of the Participant Information Sheet and Consent Form.
7. Except for damages resulting from negligent or malicious conduct of the researcher(s), I hereby release and discharge UiTM and all participating researchers from all liability associated with, arising out of, or related to my participation. I agree to hold them harmless from any harm or loss that may be incurred by me due to my participation in the research.

 Name of Participant/Legally authorized representative (LAR)	 Signature
I.C.No _____	<u>T nh»h</u>
Name of Witness ³ _____	Signature
I.C No _____	Date
Name of Consent Taker _____	Signature
I.C.No _____	Date

¹ Original signed copy is to be retained by the Principal Investigator

² Delete whichever is not applicable.

³ A witness is only required for oral consent.

APPENDIX 25

Consent Form 21

Note: Representative identities will not be fully disclosed

Consent Form¹

CwWBntR a participant in the research, you or your legal guardian are required to sign this

I herewith confirm that I have met the requirement of age and am capable of acting on behalf of myself / as² a legal guardian as follows:

1. I understand the nature and scope of the research being undertaken.
2. I have read and understood all the terms and conditions of my participation in the research.
3. **All** my questions relating to this research and my participation therein have been answered to my satisfaction.
4. I voluntarily agree to take part in this research, to follow the study procedures and to provide all necessary information to the investigators as requested.
5. I may at any time choose to withdraw from this research without giving any reason.
6. I have received a copy of the Participant Information Sheet and Consent Form.
7. Except for damages resulting from negligent or malicious conduct of the researcher(s), I hereby release and discharge UiTM and all participating researchers from all liability associated with, arising out of, or related to my participation. I agree to hold them harmless from any harm or loss that may be incurred by me due to my participation in the research.

Name of Participant/Legally authorized representative (LAR)

Signature

Name of Witness³

Signature

I.C No

Date

Name of Consent **Taker**

Signature

I.C No

Date

¹ Original signed copy is to be retained by the Principal Investigator

² Delete whichever is not applicable.

³ A witness is only required for oral consent.

APPENDIX 26

Consent Form 22



Note: Representative identities will not be fully disclosed

Consent Form¹

To become a participant in the research, you or your legal guardian are required to sign this Consent Form

I herewith confirm that I have met the requirement of age and am capable of acting on behalf of myself / as² a legal guardian as follows:

1. I understand the nature and scope of the research being undertaken.
2. I have read and understood all the terms and conditions of my participation in the research.
3. All my questions relating to this research and my participation therein have been answered to my satisfaction.
4. I voluntarily agree to take part in this research, to follow the study procedures and to provide all necessary information to the investigators as requested.
5. I may at any time choose to withdraw from this research without giving any reason.
6. I have received a copy of the Participant Information Sheet and Consent Form.
7. Except for damages resulting from negligent or malicious conduct of the researcher(s), I hereby release and discharge UiTM and all participating researchers from all liability associated with, arising out of, or related to my participation. I agree to hold them harmless from any harm or loss that may be incurred by me due to my participation in the research.

	
Name of Participant/Legally authorized representative (LAR)	Signature
I.C.No	Date
Name of Witness ³	Signature
I.C.No	Date
Name of Consent Taker	Signature
I.C No	Date

¹ Original signed copy is to be retained by the Principal Investigator

² Delete whichever is not applicable.

³ A witness is only required for oral consent

APPENDIX 27

Consent Form 23

Note: Representative identities will not be fully disclosed

Consent Form¹

To become a participant in the research, you or your legal guardian are required to sign this Consent Form

I herewith confirm that I have met the requirement of age and am capable of acting on behalf of myself / as² a legal guardian as follows:

1. I understand the nature and scope of the research being undertaken.
2. I have read and understood all the terms and conditions of my participation in the research.
3. All my questions relating to this research and my participation therein have been answered to my satisfaction.
4. I voluntarily agree to take part in this research, to follow the study procedures and to provide all necessary information to the investigators as requested.
5. I may at any time choose to withdraw from this research without giving any reason.
6. I have received a copy of the Participant Information Sheet and Consent Form
7. Except for damages resulting from negligent or malicious conduct of the researcher(s), I hereby release and discharge UiTM and all participating researchers from all liability associated with, arising out of, or related to my participation. I agree to hold them harmless from any harm or loss that may be incurred by me due to my participation in the research.

^ ^ f | ^ ^

Name of Participant/Legally authorized representative (LAR)	Signature
I.C.No ^ g ^ H j	Date 2.5//Of 2023
Name ~ of W i t n e s s ^ 5 ~ ^	Signaturr w ^ ^ S
I . C N o ^ ^ ^ ^ ^	Date ~ ^
Name of Consent Taker	Signature
I.C No	Date

¹ Original signed copy is to be retained by the Principal Investigator

² Delete whichever is not applicable.

³ A witness is only required for oral consent.

APPENDIX 28

Consent Form 24

Note: Representative identities will not be fully disclosed

Consent Form¹

To become a participant in the research, you or your legal guardian are required to sign this Consent Form.

I herewith confirm that I have met the requirement of age and am capable of acting on behalf of myself / as² a legal guardian as follows:

1. I understand the nature and scope of the research being undertaken.
2. I have read and understood all the terms and conditions of my participation in the research.
3. All my questions relating to this research and my participation therein have been answered to my satisfaction.
4. I voluntarily agree to take part in this research, to follow the study procedures and to provide all necessary information to the investigators as requested.
5. I may at any time choose to withdraw from this research without giving any reason.
6. I have received a copy of the Participant Information Sheet and Consent Form.
7. Except for damages resulting from negligent or malicious conduct of the researcher(s), I hereby release and discharge UiTM and all participating researchers from all liability associated with, arising out of, or related to my participation. I agree to hold them harmless from any harm or loss that may be incurred by me due to my participation in the research.

Name of Participant/Legally authorized representative (LAR) Signati

I.CNo

firm

"Date"

24 ~ /ft . 14

Name of Witness³

Signature

'•CNo

5 ^

Name of Consent Taker

Signature

I.CNo

Date

¹Original signed copy is to be retained by the Principal Investigator

Delete whichever is not applicable

³A witness is only required for oral consent.

APPENDIX 29

Consent Form 25

Note: Representative identities will not be fully disclosed

Consent Form¹

To become a participant in the research, you or your legal guardian are required to sign this Consent Form.

I herewith confirm that I have met the requirement of age and am capable of acting on behalf of myself / as² a legal guardian as follows:

1. I understand the nature and scope of the research being undertaken.
2. I have read and understood all the terms and conditions of my participation in the research.
3. All my questions relating to this research and my participation therein have been answered to my satisfaction.
4. I voluntarily agree to take part in this research, to follow the study procedures and to provide all necessary information to the investigators as requested.
5. I may at any time choose to withdraw from this research without giving any reason.
6. I have received a copy of the Participant Information Sheet and Consent Form.
7. Except for damages resulting from negligent or malicious conduct of the researchers), I hereby release and discharge UiTM and all participating researchers from all liability associated with, arising out of, or related to my participation. I agree to hold them harmless from any harm or loss that may be incurred by me due to my participation in the research.

Name of Participant/Legally authorized representative (LAR)	Signature
I.CNo A ^ ^ M B iZ	Date
Name of Witness ³	Signature
I.CNo	Date
Name of Consent Taker	Signature
I.CNo	Date

¹Original signed copy is to be retained by the Principal Investigator.

²Delete whichever is not applicable.

³A witness is only required for oral consent.

APPENDIX 30

Consent Form 26

Note: Representative identities will not be fully disclosed

Consent Form¹

Consent Form¹ Participant in Research | you or your legal guardian **are required to sign** this

I herewith confirm that I have met the requirement of age and am capable of acting on behalf of myself / as² a legal guardian as follows:

1. I understand the nature and scope of the research being undertaken.
2. I have read and understood all the terms and conditions of my participation in the research.
3. All my questions relating to this research and my participation therein have been answered to my satisfaction.
4. I voluntarily agree to take part in this research, to follow the study procedures and to provide all necessary information to the investigators as requested.
5. I may at any time choose to withdraw from this research without giving any reason.
6. I have received a copy of the Participant Information Sheet and Consent Form.
7. Except for damages resulting from negligent or malicious conduct of the researcher(s), I hereby release and discharge UiTM and all participating researchers from all liability associated with, arising out of, or related to my participation. I agree to hold them harmless from any harm or loss that may be incurred by me due to my participation in the research.

Name of Participant/Liaison representative (LAR)	Signature
I.C. No TM	Date 17-10-2023
Name of Witness	Signature
I.C. No	Date ...
Name of Consent Taker	Signature 17-10-2023
I.C. No	Date

¹ Original signed copy is to be retained by the Principal Investigator.

² Delete whichever is not applicable.

³ A witness is only required for oral consent.

APPENDIX 31

Consent Form 27


Note: Representative identities will not be fully disclosed

Consent Form¹

To become a participant in the research, you or your legal guardian are required to sign this Consent Form.

I herewith confirm that I have met the requirement of age and am capable of acting on behalf of myself / as² a legal guardian as follows:

1. I understand the nature and scope of the research being undertaken.
2. I have read and understood all the terms and conditions of my participation in the research.
3. All my questions relating to this research and my participation therein have been answered to my satisfaction.
4. I voluntarily agree to take part in this research, to follow the study procedures and to provide all necessary information to the investigators as requested.
5. I may at any time choose to withdraw from this research without giving any reason.
6. I have received a copy of the Participant Information Sheet and Consent Form.
7. Except for damages resulting from negligent or malicious conduct of the researcher(s), I hereby release and discharge UiTM and all participating researchers from all liability associated with, arising out of, or related to my participation. I agree to hold them harmless from any harm or loss that may be incurred by me due to my participation in the research.


Name of Participant/Legally authorized representative (LAR) Signature
I.C.No " A T ^ H ^ S S A Date ;2_0- I (Q I ?SD 2J*>
Name of Witness³ Signature
I.C.No Date
Name of Consent Taker Signature
I.C No Date

¹ Original signed copy is to be retained by the Principal Investigator.

² Delete whichever is not applicable.

³ A witness is only required for oral consent.

APPENDIX 32

Consent Form 28

Note: Representative identities will not be fully disclosed

Consent Form¹

To become a participant in the research, you or your legal guardian are required to sign this Consent Form.

I herewith confirm that I have met the requirement of age and am capable of acting on behalf of myself / as² a legal guardian as follows:

1. I understand the nature and scope of the research being undertaken.
2. I have read and understood all the terms and conditions of my participation in the research.
3. All my questions relating to this research and my participation therein have been answered to my satisfaction.
4. I voluntarily agree to take part in this research, to follow the study procedures and to provide all necessary information to the investigators as requested.
5. I may at any time choose to withdraw from this research without giving any reason.
6. I have received a copy of the Participant Information Sheet and Consent Form.
7. Except for damages resulting from negligent or malicious conduct of the researcher(s), I hereby release and discharge UiTM and all participating researchers from all liability associated with, arising out of, or related to my participation. I agree to hold them harmless from any harm or loss that may be incurred by me due to my participation in the research.



Name of Participant/Legally authorized representative (LAP.)	Signature
I.CNo /J)	Date fo//6 12-&Z3
Name of Witness ³	Signature
I.CNo	Date
Name of Consent Taker	Signature
I.CNo	Date

¹ Original signed copy is to be retained by the Principal Investigator.

² Delete whichever is not applicable.

³ A witness is only required for oral consent.

APPENDIX 33

Consent Form 29

Note: Representative identities will not be fully disclosed

Consent Form¹

To become a participant in the research, you or your legal guardian are required to sign this Consent Form.

I herewith confirm that I have met the requirement of age and am capable of acting on behalf of myself / as² a legal guardian as follows:

1. I understand the nature and scope of the research being undertaken.
2. I have read and understood all the terms and conditions of my participation in the research
3. All my questions relating to this research and my participation therein have been answered to my satisfaction.
4. I voluntarily agree to take part in this research, to follow the study procedures and to provide all necessary information to the investigators as requested.
5. I may at any time choose to withdraw from this research without giving any reason.
6. I have received a copy of the Participant Information Sheet and Consent Form.
7. Except for damages resulting from negligent or malicious conduct of the researcher(s), I hereby release and discharge UiTM and all participating researchers from all liability associated with, arising out of, or related to my participation. I agree to hold them harmless from any harm or loss that may be incurred by me due to my participation in the research.

Name of Participant/Legally authorized representative (LAR)	Signature
I.C.No j/m	Date 1/1/2010
Name of Witness ³	Signature
I.C.No	Date
Name of Consent Taker	Signature
I.C No	Date

¹ Original signed copy is to be retained by the Principal Investigator.

² Delete whichever is not applicable.

³ A witness is only required for oral consent.

APPENDIX 34

Consent Form 30

Note: Representative identities will not be fully disclosed

Y-7-_____. _____ Consent Form¹ _____
Co . T⁶ a Participant on the research, you or your legal guardian are r^u Tredlolin This

I herewith confirm that I have met the requirement of age and am capable of acting on behalf of myself / as² a legal guardian as follows:

- 1 I understand the nature and scope of the research being undertaken.
- 2 I have read and understood all the terms and conditions of my participation in the research.
3. All my questions relating to this research and my participation therein have been answered to my satisfaction
4. I voluntarily agree to take part in this research, to follow the study procedures and to provide all necessary information to the investigators as requested.
5. I may at any time choose to withdraw from this research without giving any reason.
6. I have received a copy of the Participant Information Sheet and Consent Form
- 7 Except for damages resulting from negligent or malicious conduct of the researcher(s), I hereby release and discharge UiTM and all participating researchers from all liability associated with, arising out of, or related to my participation. I agree to hold them harmless from any harm or loss that may be incurred by me due to my participation in the research.

• H - • _____ E >
Name of Participant/Legally authorized representative (LAR)


Signature

C No

Date 17/10/2017 >f>3-3

Name of Witness³

Signature

I.C No

Date

Name of Consent Taker

Signature

I.C No

Date

¹Original signed copy is to be retained by the Principal Investigator.

²Delete whichever is not applicable

³A witness is only required for oral consent

APPENDIX 36

Consent Form 32



Note: Representative identities will not be fully disclosed

Consent Form¹

To become a participant in the research, you or your legal guardian are required to sign this Consent Form.

I herewith confirm that I have met the requirement of age and am capable of acting on behalf of myself / as² a legal guardian as follows:

1. I understand the nature and scope of the research being undertaken.
2. I have read and understood all the terms and conditions of my participation in the research.
3. All my questions relating to this research and my participation therein have been answered to my satisfaction.
4. I voluntarily agree to take part in this research, to follow the study procedures and to provide all necessary information to the investigators as requested.
5. I may at any time choose to withdraw from this research without giving any reason.
6. I have received a copy of the Participant Information Sheet and Consent Form.
7. Except for damages resulting from negligent or malicious conduct of the researchers), I hereby release and discharge UiTM and all participating researchers from all liability associated with, arising out of, or related to my participation. I agree to hold them harmless from any harm or loss that may be incurred by me due to my participation in the research.

 
Name of Participant/Legally authorized representative (LAR) Signature


Name of Witness³ Signature

I.CNo Date

Name of Consent Taker Signature

I.CNo ~" Date

¹ Original signed copy is to be retained by the Principal Investigator.

² Delete whichever is not applicable.

³ A witness is only required for oral consent.

APPENDIX 37

Consent Form 33

Note: Representative identities will not be fully disclosed

Consent Form¹

To become a participant in the research, you or your legal guardian are required to sign this Consent Form.

I herewith confirm that I have met the requirement of age and am capable of acting on behalf of myself / as² a legal guardian as follows.

1. I understand the nature and scope of the research being undertaken.
2. I have read and understood all the terms and conditions of my participation in the research.
3. All my questions relating to this research and my participation therein have been answered to my satisfaction.
4. I voluntarily agree to take part in this research, to follow the study procedures and to provide all necessary information to the investigators as requested.
5. I may at any time choose to withdraw from this research without giving any reason.
6. I have received a copy of the Participant Information Sheet and Consent Form.
7. Except for damages resulting from negligent or malicious conduct of the researcher(s), I hereby release and discharge UiTM and all participating researchers from all liability associated with, arising out of, or related to my participation. I agree to hold them harmless from any harm or loss that may be incurred by me due to my participation in the research.

Name of Participant/Legally authorized representative (LAR)	Signature
I.C No	Date
Name of Witness ³	Signature
I.CNo	Date
Name of Consent Taker	Signature
I.CNo	Date

¹ Original signed copy is to be retained by the Principal Investigator.

² Delete whichever is not applicable.

³ A witness is only required for oral consent

APPENDIX 38

Consent Form 34

Note: Representative identities will not be fully disclosed

Consent Form¹

To become a participant in the research, you or your legal **guardian are required to sign this Consent Form.**

I herewith confirm that I have met the requirement of age and am capable of acting on behalf of myself / as² a legal guardian as follows:

1. I understand the nature and scope of the research being undertaken.
2. I have read and understood all the terms and conditions of my participation in the research.
3. All my questions relating to this research and my participation therein have been answered to my satisfaction.
4. I voluntarily agree to take part in this research, to follow the study procedures and to provide all necessary information to the investigators as requested.
5. I may at any time choose to withdraw from this research without giving any reason.
6. I have received a copy of the Participant Information Sheet and Consent Form.
7. Except for damages resulting from negligent or malicious conduct of the researcher(s), I hereby release and discharge UiTM and all participating researchers from all liability associated with, arising out of, or related to my participation. I agree to hold them harmless from any harm or loss that may be incurred by me due to my participation in the research.

MURUTHALA MOOSA

Name of Participant/Legally authorized representative (LAR)

Signature

I.C. No

Date

A082001

17 OCTOBER 2023

Name of Witness(es) _____

Signature

I.C. No

Date

Name of Co-researcher(s) _____

Signature

I.C. No

Date

¹ Original signed copy is to be retained by the Principal Investigator. Delete whichever is not applicable.

³ A witness is only required for oral consent.

APPENDIX 39

Consent Form 35


Note: Representative identities will not be fully disclosed

Consent Form¹

To become a participant in the research, you or your legal guardian are required to sign this

I herewith confirm that I have met the requirement of age and am capable of acting on behalf of myself / as² a legal guardian as follows:

1. I understand the nature and scope of the research being undertaken.
2. I have read and understood all the terms and conditions of my participation in the research.
3. All my questions relating to this research and my participation therein have been answered to my satisfaction
4. I voluntarily agree to take part in this research, to follow the study procedures and to provide all necessary information to the investigators as requested.
5. I may at any time choose to withdraw from this research without giving any reason.
6. I have received a copy of the Participant Information Sheet and Consent Form.
7. Except for damages resulting from negligent or malicious conduct of the researcher(s), I hereby release and discharge UiTM and all participating researchers from all liability associated with, arising out of, or related to my participation. I agree to hold them harmless from any harm or loss that may be incurred by me due to my participation in the research.

Name of Participant/Legally authorized representative (LAR)	Signature
 (^^^j-	Date <i>ty1V9*n •</i>
Name of Witness ³	Signature
I.C No	Date
Name of Consent Taker	Signature
I.C No	Date

¹ Original signed copy is to be retained by the Principal Investigator.

² Delete whichever is not applicable.

³ A witness is only required for oral consent

APPENDIX 40

Consent Form 36

Note: Representative identities will not be fully disclosed

Consent Form

To become a participant in the research, you or your legal guardian are required to sign this Consent Form.

I herewith confirm that I have met the requirement of age and am capable of acting on behalf of myself / as² a legal guardian as follows:

1. I understand the nature and scope of the research being undertaken.
2. I have read and understood all the terms and conditions of my participation in the research.
3. All my questions relating to this research and my participation therein have been answered to my satisfaction.
4. I voluntarily agree to take part in this research, to follow the study procedures and to provide all necessary information to the investigators as requested.
5. I may at any time choose to withdraw from this research without giving any reason.
6. I have received a copy of the Participant Information Sheet and Consent Form.
7. Except for damages resulting from negligent or malicious conduct of the researchers), I hereby release and discharge UiTM and all participating researchers from all liability associated with, arising out of, or related to my participation. I agree to hold them harmless from any harm or loss that may be incurred by me due to my participation in the research.

Name of Participant/Legally authorized representative (LAR)	Signature
I.C No	Date
Name of Witness*	Signature
I.C No	Date
Name of Consent Taker	Signature
I.C No	Date

Original signed copy is to be retained by the Principal Investigator.

« Delete whichever is not applicable.

• A witness is only required for oral consent.

AUTHOR'S PROFILE

Ameena Adam began her career in the Human Rights Commission of the Maldives, where she worked from 2007 to 2016. During this time, she earned her Bachelor of Business Administration (BBA) in Human Resource Management from Heriot-Watt University, UK, through its partnership with Clique College, Maldives, in 2016. That same year, she received a scholarship to pursue a Master's degree in Sociology at Lovely Professional University in Punjab, India, which she completed in 2018.

LIST OF PUBLICATIONS:

Adam, A., Ahmad, Y., & Kassim, A. (2024). An uphill battle: A systematic literature review on the challenges of addressing child sexual abuse (CSA) in Developing Countries. *Environment-Behaviour Proceedings Journal*, 9(SI20), 237-243.

Adam, A., & Ahmad, Y., Kassim, A. (2024). The only way out is through: A systematic literature review of the intervention mechanisms for child sexual abuse in Asia. *International Journal of Research and Innovation in Social Science*, 8(16), 15-44.

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