

Through the Lens

Parents' Experiences Following Sexual Violence Against Their Children

Insights from Interviews with Parents in Central Asia:
Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, and Tajikistan



Project Lens

Project Lens is an initiative led by Protect Children in collaboration with the University of Eastern Finland and with support from child-rights organisations in Central Asia (Child's Rights Defenders League, Kyrgyzstan; Istiqbolli Avlod, Uzbekistan; Tashabbusi Huquqi, Tajikistan; Union of Crisis Centers, Kazakhstan; Women Lawyers, Tajikistan), which aims to understand and prevent emerging forms of image-based sexual violence against children. Project Lens will build a robust knowledge base to inform and implement a comprehensive, system-wide response to image-based child sexual violence.

Learn more: <https://www.protectchildren.fi/en/project-lens>



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Executive Summary

This report presents insights from interviews with parents of children who have experienced sexual violence in Central Asia to examine the impact of child sexual violence, and especially image-based violence, on children, parents, caregivers, and the wider family.

In June and July 2026, interviews were conducted with ten parents in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan.

The findings highlight the complex, long-lasting, and diverse impacts, while also underscoring the important role of wider social and community contexts in shaping these experiences.

Child sexual violence affected not only children, but also parents, siblings, family relationships, everyday life, financial security, and employment.

Interviews revealed the significant role of neighbours and wider society, with experiences ranging from meaningful support to stigma, isolation, and gossip.

Together, these findings demonstrate the need for support that recognises the wider impact of child sexual violence on families and communities, alongside the needs of children.

We are deeply grateful to the parents who shared their experiences and perspectives, contributing to a better understanding of the realities faced by families following child sexual violence.



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Introduction

Child sexual abuse and exploitation is a global public health crisis with long-term impacts on victims and survivors. While these impacts are increasingly recognised, the experiences and needs of parents and caregivers remain comparatively underexplored.

This report examines the experiences of parents and caregivers in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan whose children have experienced sexual violence. We take a family-centred approach, recognising that child sexual violence can affect the wellbeing, relationships, daily lives, and circumstances of the whole family.

Through interviews with parents, the report explores what parents have shared about how these experiences have affected their own wellbeing, their relationships with their children and other family members, their everyday lives, and their interactions with their communities and wider society. In particular, the report examines the impact of image-based sexual violence, which affects an estimated one in eight children globally.¹

Definition: Image-Based Child Sexual Violence

Image-based child sexual violence refers to any act related to the non-consensual creation, distribution, or threatened distribution of sexual images, videos, or other visual material depicting a person under the age of 18. It also includes the possession of such material.

The material can be real, synthetic, or altered, and can be recorded, livestreamed, or generated, as well as can be shared through digital or offline means. It also covers acts such as coercing or blackmailing a child to share sexual content.

There is a significant lack of up-to-date and country-specific data on the prevalence and impact of sexual violence against children in Central Asia, even more so in relation to image-based harm. At the same time, available evidence indicates that children and young people across the region face significant risks of image-based sexual abuse and exploitation. Limited research means that the experiences of affected children, families, and communities remain insufficiently understood, and their support needs may not be met.

This report provides a preliminary exploration of the impacts reported by parents and caregivers whose children have experienced image-based or contact child sexual violence. The findings demonstrate that these experiences can have complex, long-lasting, and far-reaching consequences, affecting not only children but also parents and caregivers, siblings, family relationships, everyday life, and engagement with wider communities.

¹ Childlight. (2025). Into the Light Index. <https://www.childlight.org/into-the-light>.

Project Lens

Project Lens aims to strengthen the evidence base on image-based child sexual violence through three interconnected research strands:

1. **Victims and survivors.** Surveying victims and survivors to understand their experiences and the impacts of image-based child sexual violence.
2. **Professionals.** Investigating the attitudes, challenges, and perspectives of professionals involved in identifying, investigating, and addressing image-based child sexual violence.
3. **Parents and caregivers.** Exploring the experiences and impacts of image-based child sexual violence on parents, caregivers, and their families.

This report is based on the third research strand, focusing on the experiences of parents and caregivers whose children have experienced image-based or contact child sexual violence.

Child Sexual Violence in Central Asia: Evidence Gaps

Available data on child sexual violence in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan is limited and often presents statistics combining these countries together or with adjacent regions. A recent systematic review found that approximately 13.5% of girls and 7.1% of boys in Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, and Kyrgyzstan experience child sexual violence.²

While the data on image-based sexual abuse and exploitation is even more scarce, a landscape analysis conducted as a part of Project Lens earlier found that similar patterns of image-based child sexual violence arise in Central Asia as globally.³ It is also important to acknowledge the complexity of the local context, which impacts research and the collection of data on these crimes in Central Asia.

Image-based child sexual violence is only beginning to gain recognition in the region, with its widespread nature and severe long-term impacts not being acknowledged fully. Victims and survivors themselves may not realise that what happened to them constitutes abuse and is serious enough to report.

Crimes of image-based sexual violence against children are under-reported.⁴

Victims and survivors may refrain from disclosure, not realising the severity of the incident, internalising victim-blaming sentiments, fearing reaction from close ones, or protecting themselves and their families from societal backlash.⁵

² Cagney, J., Spencer, C., Flor, L., Herbert, M., Khalil, M., O'Connell, E., Mullany, E., Bustreo, F., Singh Chandan, J., Metheny, N., Knaul, F., & Gakidou, E. (2025). Prevalence of sexual violence against children and age at first exposure: a global analysis by location, age, and sex (1990-2023). *Lancet* (London, England), 405(10492), 1817–1836. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736\(25\)00311-3](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(25)00311-3).

³ Protect Children. (2025). Through the Lens: Insights into Image-Based Child Sexual Violence. <https://www.protectchildren.fi/en/post/through-the-lens-report>.

⁴ UNICEF. (2025). Ending violence against children in Europe and Central Asia. <https://www.unicef.org/eca/reports/ending-violence-against-children-europe-and-central-asia>.

⁵ Akisheva, A. (2025). A study on violence against women and girls and its legal and policy regulation in Central Asia. *Journal of Gender-Based Violence*, 1-27. <https://doi.org/10.1332/23986808Y2025D000000112>.

The topic of child sexual violence remains a taboo, due to, among other reasons, the prevalence of patriarchal norms, strong stigma, and the belief that the incident may impose shame on the entire family.⁶

Gendered dynamics are very influential, hindering disclosure, reporting, criminal proceedings, and access to support.⁷ Pervasiveness of gendered roles, expectations of masculinity, and homophobia silence experiences of boys.⁸

Affected families face significant societal pressure, as families' everyday life is largely shaped by interactions with immediate community that often gets closely involved when sexual violence occurs.⁹

Sexual violence intersects with other pressing issues and prevalent forms of violence, such as domestic abuse, labour migration, parental absence, and poverty.¹⁰

⁶ Afanasieva, K., Vasilkova, A., Konurbaeva, A., Dzhamayev, M., Dzhamayeva, A. (N.d.). Shattered Childhood: Children in Central Asia Mostly Keep Silent about Sexualised Abuse. Central Asian Bureau for Analytical Reporting. https://longreads.cabar.asia/childviolence_en.

⁷ Akisheva, A. (2025). A study on violence against women and girls and its legal and policy regulation in Central Asia. Journal of Gender-Based Violence, 1-27. <https://doi.org/10.1332/23986808Y2025D000000112>.

⁸ ECPAT International. (2024). Regional Workshop 25-27 September - Tashkent, Uzbekistan. ECPAT International. https://ecpat.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/02/Tashkent_RegionalOutcome_2024DEC_v2.pdf.

⁹ Korosteleva, E. (2025). Complexity and Community in International Relations: Nurturing Resilience in Central Eurasia. <https://doi.org/10.1093/9780191989278.001.0001>.

¹⁰ ECPAT International. (2024). Regional Workshop 25-27 September - Tashkent, Uzbekistan. ECPAT International. https://ecpat.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/02/Tashkent_RegionalOutcome_2024DEC_v2.pdf.

Methodology

Study Design

We conducted trauma-informed interviews with parents of child victims of image-based and contact sexual violence in collaboration with local partners in Central Asia:

- Kazakhstan – The Union of Crisis Centers
- Kyrgyzstan – Child’s Rights Defenders League
- Tajikistan – Tashabbusi Huquqi and Women Lawyers for Development
- Uzbekistan – Istiqbolli Avlod.



Interview framework | The interview framework included questions across six domains:

1. The impacts of image-based child sexual violence on the whole family.
2. Support that parents have received or have wished to receive when dealing with the aftermath of the abuse.
3. Parental experiences of disclosing what happened to their child.
4. Experiences of reporting and criminal proceedings.
5. Themes of coping and healing.
6. Participants’ messages and insights to professionals and other families.

The framework mirrors the structure of the [Through the Lens survey](#) for adult victims and survivors of image-based child sexual violence.

Participant recruitment | The interview participants were recruited by local partners through existing connections with families affected by child sexual violence.

Method | Interviews were conducted by our partners in the languages spoken in each partner country and preferred by parents. The interviews were recorded in audio-format and transcriptions were produced manually. The transcriptions were anonymised and pseudonymised and translated into English for analysis. All directly identifiable personal information and any indirectly identifiable information that could reasonably lead to the identification of participants was omitted or modified. We used thematic analysis to identify and explore prevalent themes.

Sample | We interviewed 10 parents in total, including one mother in Tajikistan, four mothers in Uzbekistan, and two mothers in Kazakhstan, whose children have suffered contact and image-based sexual violence victimisation; and one mother in Tajikistan

and two mothers in Kyrgyzstan whose children have fallen victim to contact sexual violence.

Data collection | The interviews were conducted in June-July 2026.

Ethics and Safeguarding

Ethics | The study adhered to strict ethical standards. This included assessment of the ethical aspect of the interviews, development of the research plan and data management plan, and data protection impact assessment. Partner organisations were provided with a detailed guide for conducting trauma-informed interviews and managing collected data. All participants were provided with an accessible participant information sheet which provided key information about the study protocol, participation, and participant rights.

Safeguarding | The interview framework was developed by senior specialists from Protect Children in collaboration with specialists from the University of Eastern Finland. The framework was designed to avoid imposing harm on the interview participants. Protect Children has extensive experience facilitating peer-support groups for parents and caregivers whose children have fallen victim to sexual violence, which laid foundation for this study.

Interviews were conducted by trained specialists. A psychologist was present at all interviews to monitor the wellbeing of the interviewee and interfere, if needed. Interview participants were informed of help and support available to them. Participants had the right to withdraw their consent to participate in the study and remove all data collected on them at any point, without suffering any negative consequences. During the interview, participants were allowed to take breaks whenever needed.

Cultural sensitivity | Cultural sensitivity was considered throughout the design and conduct of the research, recognising that participants' experiences and insights are shaped by their social and cultural contexts. Prior to the interviews, we conducted a review of the regional context, challenges, and involvement of local professionals, which supported culturally appropriate data collection and interpretation.¹¹

Use of participants' quotes | With the permission of the research participants, the report includes quotes of the participants' speech. Some quotes have been modified for clarity, conciseness, or privacy reasons, while preserving the original meaning. Quotes reflect participants' beliefs, perceptions, and experiences.

Challenges and Limitations

Challenges in participant recruitment and engagement | Some challenges were encountered in recruiting and engaging parents of children who have been subjected to image-based sexual violence, potentially due to the sensitive nature of the topic and the

¹¹ Protect Children. (2025). Through the Lens: Insights into Image-Based Child Sexual Violence. <https://www.protectchildren.fi/en/post/through-the-lens-report>

surrounding stigma. These factors required particular sensitivity throughout the development of trauma-informed interviews and data collection and may also have influenced willingness or ability to participate or disclose experiences. Moreover, the limited research and recognition of image-based harms may leave these experiences unrecognised. Due to difficulties in recruiting parents whose children had experienced image-based sexual violence, the study sample was broadened to include families with other experiences of child sexual violence.

Limitations | Certain limitations arise from the study design. First, the data analysis was performed on the translated interview transcripts, which risks misinterpretation of the interviewees' accounts and words. Second, the collected data is self-reported. Third, the results represent the experiences of parents who have had contact with a support organisation, which may create bias and portray experiences of a limited group of people. Fourth, the interviews concerned a highly sensitive topic with interviewees having an opportunity to skip any questions they felt uncomfortable responding to. While some topics were discussed in-depth by some interviewees, others could refrain from sharing experiences in their entirety or provide limited details.

The Parents We Interviewed

Parents' names have been changed to protect the privacy and anonymity of participants. Pseudonyms were selected reflecting common names in their respective countries.



Madina *Tajikistan*

Madina is a single mother. While she was working abroad, her two children stayed with their close relative. A neighbour, someone the family trusted, sexually abused her 7–9-year-old daughter.



Firuza *Tajikistan*

Firuza is a married mother of two children. Her 3–6-year-old son was sexually abused and filmed by a young man running a neighbourhood store.



Aziza *Uzbekistan*

Aziza is married and has several children. Her 7–9-year-old daughter was subjected to sexual abuse by their neighbour. As part of the abuse, the neighbour also showed her sexual material.



Gulnoza *Uzbekistan*

Gulnoza is a single mother of one daughter. While visiting her close relative, Gulnoza's daughter met a married man who coerced her into a sexual relationship lasting several years. The offender and his wife later used child sexual abuse material depicting Gulnoza's daughter to blackmail her.



Farida *Uzbekistan*

Farida is a single mother of two children. While Farida and her spouse at the time were working abroad, their 13–15-year-old daughter was groomed and sexually abused by a stranger. The offender threatened to share images and videos he had recorded of the abuse and financially extorted her.



Yasmina *Uzbekistan*

Yasmina is a single mother with one daughter. Her 13–15-year-old daughter was abused by an older boy at her school, who extorted her to send money and coerced her into sexual acts by threatening to share her intimate images to everyone at school.



Aigul *Kazakhstan*

Aigul is a single mother of two children. Her daughter was violently sexually abused in her late childhood by the father of her youngest child. He recorded the abuse and threatened to disseminate the video if Aigul's daughter disclosed what had happened.



Dinara *Kazakhstan*

Dinara is a single mother of three children. Her daughter was sexually abused by a neighbour in her early childhood and had also repeatedly experienced image-based sexual abuse.



Gulmira *Kyrgyzstan*

Gulmira is a married mother of five children from two marriages. Her father-in-law from her second marriage repeatedly committed sexual violence against her 10–12-year-old daughter.



Aynura *Kyrgyzstan*

Aynura is a single mother of one daughter. Her 7–9-year-old daughter was abused by a neighbour, who was a family friend.

Parents and their backgrounds

All participants were female. Out of the ten participants, seven identified themselves as single mothers. Many had experienced divorce, with two having divorced their partner as a direct result of the sexual crime against their child. Five parents described divorcing their partner prior to the crime against their child due to other reasons, such as domestic violence or substance abuse. Two parents had since remarried.

Migration experiences

Five parents described experiences of labour migration, where one or both parents were living abroad for certain periods of time to earn money and sustain the family, which significantly shaped their living and family circumstance.

Types of violence

In all ten cases, the children had experienced contact sexual violence. Seven cases additionally involved image-based sexual violence. Participants described multiple forms of image-based sexual violence experienced by their children. Three parents described that their cases included recording of child sexual abuse material by the offender. In three cases, children were subjected to sexual extortion. Two parents described their child's experiences of sharing nude images and videos to others, referring to self-taken child sexual abuse material. Non-consensual exposure to sexual content was reported by two parents.

Victim demographics

Nine child victims were female, and one was male. Victimisation occurred across a broad range of ages, indicating that victimisation was not limited to a specific age group.

Proximity of the offender

Many cases involved the immediate communities of families, with five parents explicitly describing that the offender was a person from their neighbourhood, including four cases in which a neighbour of the family was the offender. In three cases, the offender was a family member (stepfather of the child, parent's father-in-law, parent's relative who was also a neighbour). Two cases involved a young person under the age of 18 as the offender (classmate, boy running a neighbourhood shop). In two cases, the offender was a stranger the child had met. In one of the cases, the child had also been victimised by a specialist working as part of the criminal investigation.

As some offenders occupied multiple relational roles and some cases included multiple offenders, the category frequencies overlap and do not sum to the total number of cases.

Key Findings

- 1. Child sexual violence affects the whole family.** Nine out of ten parents described impacts across the family, including strained relationships with partners, effects on other children, and affected extended family relations.
- 2. Parents experience significant physical and psychological impacts.** All parents reported impacts on their physical health, and nearly all described psychological impacts, which varied considerably between individuals.
- 3. Child sexual violence disrupts everyday life.** All parents described disruption to family routines and daily life, with many taking on increased responsibilities and fearing leaving their children alone. Six out of ten had considered or changed their place of residence.
- 4. Families face financial and employment challenges.** Eight out of ten parents reported significant financial or employment difficulties, including due to the costs and geographic inaccessibility of services.
- 5. Neighbours can provide support or create additional pressure.** Parents described neighbours and communities as important influences, with some experiencing support and understanding, while others experienced unwanted involvement or pressure.
- 6. Stigma and isolation compound the impact.** Parents described shame, social isolation, ostracisation, misunderstanding, and persistent gossip surrounding their child's experience.
- 7. Families find ways to cope and heal.** Parents described different ways of coping with the impact of sexual violence and supporting their children and families through recovery.

1. Child Sexual Violence Affects the Whole Family

Nine out of ten parents shared that the abuse affected the whole family

Nearly all participants noted a profound negative impact on the whole family.



"It's not only the child... The souls of the whole family, of everyone, are broken inside." – Dinara, Kazakhstan.



"Before the incident, our family was united. We did everything together." – Farida, Uzbekistan.

Many parents described impacts on the wellbeing of both immediate and extended family members, including relatives living outside the household. Some also reported that relationships with family members had deteriorated following their child's experience of sexual violence.



"My father, although he lives separately, was also deeply distressed by what happened." – Madina, Tajikistan.



"It was also very hard on my husband. He is a grown man, and he cried very heavily." – Firusa, Tajikistan.



"Some people come, support us. Others, like his relatives, have completely and categorically distanced themselves." – Aigul, Kazakhstan.

Eight out of ten parents first disclosed the abuse to a family member

In most cases, another family member was the first person to hear about the abuse, often immediately after the case has occurred.



"The first person I told about what had happened was my mother-in-law. Right after leaving the store, I went to her and told her everything. She was shocked, very frightened, and could not say anything." – Firusa, Tajikistan.

Some parents shared that they did not want to discuss the sexual violence against their child outside of the family circle.



"No, we did not talk about it with anyone. Only my mother and I lived through it together. And we contacted the support organisation." – Gulnoza, Uzbekistan.

All partnered parents reported negative impacts on their relationship

All six mothers who were in a relationship at the time of the abuse described that their relationship was affected by the incident, mentioning frequent arguing, lack of compassion and support, and being afraid to leave their child with a male partner due to the loss of trust in men.



"For example, now I have become afraid to leave children alone. Because he is a man, who knows them..." – Dinara, Kazakhstan.



“I was looking to him [the husband] for support, both for myself and for my daughter, and it turned out to be absolutely nothing! No involvement at all, no willingness to stand up for her, as any normal father would have done. That did not happen. To my great regret, and for me that was also a very painful moment.”
– Yasmina, Uzbekistan.

Two mothers experienced divorce following their child’s victimisation, while another reported that her husband temporarily left the family for another woman. She also described how her husband’s relatives encouraged him to remarry. These experiences may reflect the strong stigma surrounding sexual violence in the region, including the shame placed on victims and their parents, especially mothers, and toxic gender norms.



“At the time of the incident, we were a complete family. A couple of years later, we divorced. After the proceedings were completed, he decided to divorce me, left the children at home, moved to another city, and got married there.” – Farida, Uzbekistan.

Three participants described intimacy issues, including avoiding sharing a bed with their partner, reduced sexual desire, and difficulty enjoying sexual relations.



“It had a very negative impact; our sex life was disrupted for 2–4 years. When a person feels hurt or is emotionally stressed, their body feels it too and can’t reach orgasm. I thought we wouldn’t be able to go on living together and would get a divorce.” – Gulmira, Kyrgyzstan.

In two out of six cases, partners feared leaving each other alone. One mother felt unable to keep her children safe on her own, while another reported that her husband no longer goes anywhere without her.



“If he [the husband] goes somewhere nearby, he calls immediately. He only works close to home and says, “I cannot leave you. What if something happens?” So he no longer goes away.” – Aziza, Uzbekistan.

Six out of nine parents with more than one child reported that the incident also affected siblings

Parents described wide-ranging impacts on children who had not themselves experienced sexual violence, including deteriorating sibling relationships, physical fights, withdrawal, worry and guilt about not protecting their younger sibling, and running away. Siblings were also affected by changes to daily routines, financial difficulties, and relocation.



“My elder daughter says: “... I should have talked to my younger sister. Why didn’t I notice? Why didn’t she tell me anything?” Now she blames herself for it.”
– Dinara, Kazakhstan.



“While living at the crisis center, my second daughter was injured in an incident.” – Gulmira, Kyrgyzstan.



“Another negative consequence was the change in the emotional behavior of my second daughter. She did not talk to anyone and began running away from home. My younger children missed their grandmother and grandfather.” – Gulmira, Kyrgyzstan.



“My children were restricted in many ways and lost their usual way of life.” – Gulmira, Kyrgyzstan.



“My son changed a lot as well. He also experienced this tragedy.” – Madina, Tajikistan.

Two participants reported that while supporting the child victim, they felt that they could not take as much care of their other children as they would have wanted, which affected their wellbeing.



“At that time, we could not provide [my son] with help from other specialists, which is why he started school later.” – Gulmira, Kyrgyzstan.

Only one mother reported that the abuse had no effect on her other child.

2. Psychological and Physical Impacts on Parents

All parents described significant impacts on their own physical health

All parents highlighted how the incidents had impacted their own long-term physical health and wellbeing. The most commonly reported physical health issues included high blood pressure and heart problems, stomach and digestive issues, and physical pain.



“My health is poor. I have been suffering from stomach and intestinal illnesses. I constantly experience bloating and cannot digest food properly. My blood pressure has increased. I have developed heart problems.” – Firuza, Tajikistan.



“Stress also affected my stomach, and I developed ulcers. To this day, I have not fully recovered.” – Aynura, Kyrgyzstan.



“There is not a single place that does not hurt. My whole body hurts.” – Dinara, Kazakhstan.



“My blood pressure rose to 200. My condition was critical.” – Farida, Uzbekistan.

One parent described how she believed that the stress caused by the incident impacted her pregnancy, resulting in premature labour and the death of one of her children.



“When I was pregnant with twins, this incident of (sexualised violence) occurred, and I experienced extremely severe stress. I think this affected the course of my pregnancy and the children’s health. The children were born prematurely. Later one of my children had health problems. [...] I associate this with the severe stress I experienced during pregnancy after what happened.” – Aziza, Uzbekistan.



"[...] I don't know whether it was because of that, but the child lived for [anonymised], and then was gone." – Aziza, Uzbekistan.

Nine out of ten parents said the incident affected their mental wellbeing

Parents described a wide range of psychological impacts, which varied significantly between individuals. Stress and anger were most commonly reported.



"This situation affected me deeply. To this day, I still experience stress." – Aynura, Kyrgyzstan.



"As for me, looking at the whole situation, I had so much aggression! You cannot imagine the level of aggression I had." – Yasmina, Uzbekistan.



"Sometimes I feel like going and killing him [the offender], even though he is already in prison. I still carry a great deal of resentment." – Aynura, Kyrgyzstan.

Parents described several other psychological impacts, including depression, sleep problems, intrusive thoughts, fears, cognitive impairment, and suicidal ideation. These symptoms are consistent with commonly reported effects of trauma.¹²



"Sometimes I feel like giving up. There are moments when I have thoughts of suicide." – Madina, Tajikistan.



"My sleep is restless. Sometimes I wake up at two o'clock in the morning and cannot fall asleep again until dawn; sometimes I wake up at three and stay awake until morning." – Dinara, Kazakhstan.



"To be honest, now I am afraid of everything." – Firuza, Tajikistan.



"I cannot explain my thoughts to people, I cannot express my words the way I used to." – Dinara, Kazakhstan.



"I became very absent-minded. Sometimes I want to call my mother or one of my relatives, but I can spend an entire hour trying to remember whom I was about to call." – Madina, Tajikistan.

3. Disruption to Everyday Life

All parents shared that their family's everyday life was disrupted

Parents described wide-ranging disruptions to their everyday life, including increased daily hardships, disrupted routines, constant worries, persistent conflicts, fear of leaving home or inability to stay in, difficulties managing the household, and feeling as though they were in a constant battle. Some emphasised that these impacts had continued for years.

¹² Bany-Mohammed, M., Asim, S., Elalami, M., & Agrawal, D. K. (2025). Trauma, stress, and mental health outcomes. *Journal of Psychiatry and Psychiatric Disorders*, 9(5), 276–288. <https://doi.org/10.26502/jppd.2572-519X0260>



“My everyday life isn't very calm. I'm trying somehow to let the situation go, but it keeps coming back and weighing on me. I really want to forget all of this and distract myself, but I can't. I don't know. So many years have passed, and yet it still feels as if I'm fighting a battle and trying to prove something to someone.” – Yasmina, Uzbekistan.



“I was under so much stress that I could not do anything. For several years, I was not even able to keep the house properly cleaned.” – Aynura, Kyrgyzstan.

Four out of ten prioritised others' needs and lived on “autopilot”

Some parents described prioritising parental responsibilities while putting aside their own emotional needs, after finding out about the sexual violence against their child. This reflected the increased responsibility they felt for managing the practical and emotional needs of the whole family.



“I understood rationally that despite everything I still had to work and everything, well, I pulled myself together, just pulled myself together. I have children and I have certain responsibilities, so I just pulled myself together and decided that I have to keep living, I have to raise my children.” – Aigul, Kazakhstan.



“Sometimes I feel like giving up. There are moments when I have thoughts of suicide, but then I realize that my children only have me... Sometimes it feels as though I will never be able to live the way I used to. But for the sake of my children, I have to keep living. They are the only thing I have left!” – Madina, Tajikistan.



“I must first cook proper meals, dress myself properly, and not show the children that I'm crying.” – Dinara, Kazakhstan.



“I work as before, I work. But emotionally I am completely broken.” – Dinara, Kazakhstan.

Four out of ten parents feared leaving their child unsupervised

Some mothers described feeling unable to leave their children unsupervised or trust others with their care, even loved ones. This may reflect trauma-related changes in their sense of safety and trust following their child's victimisation.



“Now the gates of our house are almost always closed. I am constantly at home alone with my two children. I never let them walk around the village or go to the neighbours. Sometimes in the evening, when it gets cooler, I let them play for one or two minutes right outside the gate while I do chores and keep an eye on them. Then I immediately bring them back inside. I do not let them go anywhere else. Sometimes they visit their grandmother for a short while, but even that happens rarely.” – Firuza, Tajikistan.



“I do not know what to do about the children. I need to work to support them, but I do not know whom I can leave them with. After what happened, I am afraid to trust anyone with them.” – Madina, Tajikistan.

Six out of ten parents had considered or moved to a different place

Moving to a different place was a common way of coping with the aftermath of the abuse. Parents described varied reasons for relocating. Many believed that moving would support their child's wellbeing and the family's recovery, while some wanted to escape constant reminders of the abuse. Three mothers moved away from unsafe living conditions, including in two cases, proximity of the offender. Others felt forced or hoped to move due to social pressure, including gossip and bullying.



"In such a situation.... I would like them [the interviewee's children] to go somewhere where nobody knows them, where people do not ask these questions, where nobody knows what happened. So that they can start life again. Even if a person who knows about it asks one question or talks behind your back, it goes straight through the heart." – Aziza, Uzbekistan



"I very much want to leave this place because the house itself and the surrounding environment constantly reminds me of what happened." – Firuza, Tajikistan

4. Financial and Employment Challenges

Eight out of ten parents described significant financial impacts

Nearly all parents described significant financial difficulties as a result of the incident, with some struggling to afford basic necessities. Financial hardship was one of the most prevalent themes across the interviews.



"There were times when we had nothing to eat at home, and my son would come back from work with two loaves of bread and something else." – Farida, Uzbekistan.

Parents described several factors contributing to financial hardship, including the high cost of legal and psychological support, difficulties working or maintaining employment, relocation expenses, and frequent costly travel to access support and legal services.

High costs and centralisation of services created significant financial burdens

Six out of ten parents highlighted the high cost of psychological and legal support in their region, which parents often had to access privately. Some reported taking on additional work or loans to be able to support their families.



"Of course, everything suffered greatly: our finances, our morale, our mental health, and our whole lives changed. A huge amount of money went toward paying for private psychologists, clinics, and all those court proceedings that, in the end, were futile and achieved nothing." – Yasmina, Uzbekistan.



"I turned to private counselling services and even took on additional work myself to help my children recover from this situation" – Gulmira, Kyrgyzstan.



"I took out loans to pay for legal services. I was taking medication, and we had to go to the police station every day. It affected me greatly. As I said, we could not even eat properly at home." – Aynura, Kyrgyzstan.

The centralisation and inaccessibility of support and legal services were major contributors to financial hardship. Services were often concentrated in larger cities, requiring families to travel long distances to access support or participate in criminal proceedings. Alternatively, some families had to cover the costs of specialists travelling to them. Some parents were unable to afford support in full and had to stop accessing it prematurely.



"The constant investigations, interrogations, interviews, and traveling back and forth took not only time and nerves, but also strength and money that we did not have." – Madina, Tajikistan.



"We hired a psychologist and a lawyer from the city, and we had to pick them up and take them back, with the distance being approximately 40-70 kilometres. This became a major financial burden." – Farida, Uzbekistan.



"During the investigation, it was very difficult to help my son. We constantly lacked money even for transportation. Sometimes we had to borrow money just to get there. My husband took on temporary work, but even that was not enough." – Firuza, Tajikistan.



"If only there had been one person who would have stood up in our defence. Perhaps such people exist, namely lawyers, but at that time I no longer had any financial ability to obtain the services of a qualified lawyer, you know." – Yasmina, Uzbekistan.

Eight out of ten parents reported employment challenges

Many parents described how the incident affected their or their partner's ability to work. Stress, fear, lengthy criminal proceedings, the need to support their child or other children, and gossip all affected their ability to maintain employment and fulfil work responsibilities.



"My husband used to leave us and go abroad for work. After this incident, he can no longer go anywhere. If he goes somewhere nearby, he calls immediately. He only works close to home and says, 'I cannot leave you. What if something happens?'" – Aziza, Uzbekistan.



"I also could not return to work for a very long time because of the enormous stress and all the endless proceedings." – Yasmina, Uzbekistan.



"I'm not working at the moment..., it isn't working out..., mostly because of the children..., at home." – Madina, Tajikistan.

5. The Role of Neighbours and the Wider Community

Conversations with parents revealed that the immediate community, particularly neighbours, plays an important role in family life and often becomes closely involved following sexual violence. This is deeply rooted in the cultural values in the region, where neighbours may share close relationships, provide mutual support, and respond collectively to threats. While these strong connections can provide valuable support, they can also place additional burdens on families when sexual violence is highly stigmatised.

Six out of ten parents mentioned neighbours in the interviews

Neighbours were discussed in the majority of the interviews, highlighting their important role in family and community life. Some parents described the gravity of the impact of their child's experience through the changes in their relationships with neighbours.



"I stay at home, keep the gate closed, and do not go anywhere. I do not even visit the neighbours" – Firuza, Tajikistan.



"I withdrew from the people around me. Even when good things happened, I decided not to communicate with anyone and not to be friends with my neighbours. I stopped talking to them altogether." – Aynura, Kyrgyzstan.



"I had never told anyone about it in such detail. When I came to the specialist and to counselling sessions, I spoke from the heart, from deep inside, and told things that I could not tell anyone else. For example, I could not tell the neighbours." – Aziza, Uzbekistan.

In some cases, neighbours supported the family through challenging times, including by sharing food, providing emotional support, or helping with the criminal proceedings.



"The neighbours tell me, "No one is judging you," but it is still difficult for me." – Madina, Tajikistan.



"First, my relative ran outside and asked the neighbours where the local administration representative lived. They immediately called the representative over." – Madina, Tajikistan.



"The neighbors gave me water and took me home." "After that, all the neighbors stayed with me. There was no one at home." – Aziza, Uzbekistan.

In one case, neighbours were the only people outside of the family circle who were aware of the crime.



"Only the neighbours knew, and they did not report it." – Gulmira, Kyrgyzstan.

While close relationships with neighbours provided support in some cases, others described feeling isolated, ashamed, or afraid to leave the house (see more in [6. Stigma, Isolation, and Social Pressure](#)), as well as overwhelmed by persistent talk and

gossip that was difficult to avoid in a tight-knit community. Lack of respect for family privacy was also a common theme.



“For several years, this affected not only me. I hardly left the house. More than me, it affected the children and my husband. It was difficult for us in front of the neighbours.” – Aziza, Uzbekistan.



“The neighbours constantly ask how the case ended and what happened. Because of that, I have to recall all the details again and again. Rumours spread quickly in the village. People talk about it, and it is very difficult for me. It humiliates my child’s dignity.” – Firuza, Tajikistan.



“Everything hurts. But what troubles me most is what people say. Every time neighbours come to see me or leave, they bring up my son. That alone is enough to make it very difficult for me again.” – Firuza, Tajikistan.



“I did cut off the water, and afterward the neighbour took the side of the neighbour who had abused my daughter.” – Aynura, Kyrgyzstan.

Importantly, in five of the ten cases, the offender was a neighbour (see [The Parents We Interviewed](#)).

6. Stigma, Isolation, and Social Pressure

There is complex societal stigma around sexual violence against children

The interviews demonstrated that child sexual violence, especially when involving image-based abuse and exploitation, is surrounded by complex stigma and shame that significantly shapes the experiences of affected families. These dynamics can negatively affect family wellbeing, while also hindering criminal procedures, support, and healing.

Various narratives of guilt and shame were strongly present in the interviews.



“Many people judged me and said that I should have been watching my child more closely, including my own mother. She said that I had failed to keep an eye on my only daughter. Then I thought to myself, if my own mother thinks that way, what can I expect from others?” – Gulmira, Kyrgyzstan.

Four mothers shared that they had hidden what happened to their child either fully or in part from their partner, other relatives, or even investigators, due to strong feelings of shame or fear for the reaction that may follow.



“During the investigation, I did not tell either my husband or the investigators about [the offender committing violence on various occasions]. My husband was already taking it very hard. If I had told my husband that the offender had called her before as well, it would have been even harder for him.” – Aziza, Uzbekistan.



“None of them [relatives] know about the actual crime. I did not want them to find out because I was afraid of shame and gossip.” – Firuza, Tajikistan.

Violence against the child was sometimes perceived as bringing shame on the entire extended family. Two parents reported that family members pressured them not to report the crime due to fears of social repercussions.



“However, my mother said many hurtful things, imposed restrictions on me, and criticised me, saying that I was bringing shame on the family.” – Aynura, Kyrgyzstan.



“And my husband said, “If anyone finds out about this, I will commit suicide (hang myself).” I was genuinely afraid that if other people learned about it, my father-in-law or my husband might hang themselves.” – Aynura, Kyrgyzstan.

In some cases, societal pressure, shame, and gossip were so strong that the family had to relocate (See more in [3. Disruption to Everyday Life](#)).

Two parents described difficulties processing their emotions and, at times, struggling with thoughts that placed responsibility on the child for what had happened. This highlights the complex ways parents may try to make sense of the violence, and how internalised stigma can affect their ability to understand and support their child.



“If I’m being honest, perhaps at some point I may even have judged her, but I never told her that. Uh, I tried to understand her. It is very painful.” – Yasmina, Uzbekistan.

Many families suffered social isolation, including in their own family

Six out of ten parents described social isolation, including avoiding social interactions and leaving the house. Parents reported fearing encounters with neighbours, gossip and questions about the incident, losing the desire to communicate, and trying to protect their child from gossip.



“We can no longer go outside in peace. Wherever we go, people talk about what happened to our child.” – Firuza, Tajikistan.



“I do not want to talk to people anymore. I do not want to have conversations. Even when someone calls me on the phone, I do not want to answer.” – Dinara, Kazakhstan.

Eight parents reported that their child also experienced social isolation, with three specifically mentioning ostracisation within the family. Parents described their child’s difficulties communicating and engaging with peers, avoidance by girls and female relatives, and other parents preventing their children from interacting with them.



“The situation with the grandparents was difficult: after my daughter was found, many people at home looked at her as if she were “tainted.” They would not allow her into their rooms and kept their distance from her. Girls of her age and female relatives would not come close to her, and their parents would not allow them to be near her either. My daughter said that this was very difficult for her.” – Yasmina, Uzbekistan.

Seven out of ten parents described being affected by gossip

Gossip was a prominent theme across the interviews. Fear of gossip and anticipated negative reactions from others strongly influenced parents' decisions, leading some to isolate themselves, avoid leaving the house, relocate, or move their child to another school. In one case, gossip also led to difficulties in the workplace.



"Because whenever it seems to me that I can finally cope, the children are there, and after you leave, it feels as if people behind my back will start saying again: 'That is the child of that woman to whom such a thing happened.'" – Aziza, Uzbekistan.



"People began discussing it among themselves, and rumours started spreading. Some even said that my daughter was dying and lying in a hospital." – Madina, Tajikistan.

The close involvement of the immediate community made it difficult for parents to prevent information from spreading beyond trusted family and professional circles. In one case, concerns about the authorities' confidentiality and fear of judgement delayed the family from reporting the crime.

7. Coping and Healing as a Family

While parents described many negative impacts of the sexual violence against their child, they also identified sources of support and ways of coping and navigating these challenges. Some parents found strength in their children and relatives, while daily family activities and household projects helped them manage their experiences and maintain a sense of everyday life.



"When I go to visit my mother, I feel a little better. When I visit her, I feel calmer." – Firuza, Tajikistan.



"We would go out and buy pastries to eat. We started spending time walking around the city centre just to cope." – Aynura, Kyrgyzstan.



"After several more months, we bought a house [anonymised], moved in, and began renovating everything together from scratch. We went to the market together, hired workers, and helped the workers ourselves. That process brought us closer together. There were times when we had nothing to eat at home, and my son would come back from work with two loaves of bread and something else. In those moments, we were grateful that we were together. The children supported each other and supported me." – Farida, Uzbekistan.

Some parents described their efforts to cope, heal, and move forward in life as a family, with some also identifying strengths and personal growth that had emerged from their challenging experiences:



“Right now, I am trying to get my life back on track. I am also trying to continue supporting my daughter as much as possible, so that she can have, uh, some rays of hope for a good future. Well, I'm trying to move forward with my life.” – Yasmina, Uzbekistan.



“We're coping, we're living.” – Aigul, Kazakhstan.



“There were also positive aspects to this situation. It awakened skills and abilities within me that had been dormant while I was focused on finding solutions to the problems. I became more knowledgeable about legal matters. I also became more aware and sensitive to situations around me. Wherever I see a conflict, I react immediately and call the police.” – Gulmira, Kyrgyzstan.

Conclusion

This report presents findings from interviews with parents of children who have fallen victim to sexual violence in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan. The findings expand current understanding of the impact of image-based and contact child sexual violence on children, parents, families, and wider communities, providing significant insights for preventive and supportive measures.

The findings highlight that the impact of child sexual violence cannot be understood in isolation from the wider family context. Many parents reported that the sexual violence against their child negatively impacted their immediate and extended family's wellbeing and family relationships, highlighting the profound impact of child sexual violence on the whole family. This underscores the importance of family-centred approaches to support to recognise the impact of child sexual violence across the family and consider the needs of family members as a whole.

Moreover, the findings demonstrate the multifaceted impact of child sexual violence on parents, with consequences extending across multiple areas of life such as physical and mental wellbeing, financial stability and employment, and everyday functioning. This highlights the importance of recognising parents not only in their caregiving role, but also as individuals who may themselves experience lasting consequences of child sexual violence and have distinct support needs.

The social consequences of child sexual violence emerged as a particularly prominent aspect of parents' experiences. Many parents described changes in their social life and relationships, including experiences of isolation, shame, misunderstanding, and gossip. Particularly, the findings underscore the important role of the wider local community in shaping parents' and families' experiences. Parents reported both supportive and challenging responses from the neighbourhood, indicating that the local community can influence how parents and families navigate and cope with the impacts of child sexual violence.

Together, these findings demonstrate the urgent need to greater understanding of child sexual violence, image-based harms, and their complex impacts on children, parents, families, and wider communities in Central Asia. Simultaneously, the findings point to the importance of strengthening and improving support services for parents and whole families impacted by child sexual violence, ensuring that support reflects the diverse and long-term impacts described by parents.

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