



# Cybersex Trafficking FAQs



## **What is cybersex trafficking?**

Cybersex trafficking is a growing devastating form of modern-day slavery--the live sexual abuse of children streamed via the internet. Coerced by adults who collect money through online transactions, children are recorded or directed in real time by a predator or pedophile located anywhere in the world.

## **How is IJM fighting it?**

IJM will equip authorities to investigate and apprehend criminals running cybersex trafficking operations, bringing the children to safety so they can get the care and restoration they need. While most of the survivors we helped rescue from bars or brothel-based sex trafficking were older teens, the average age of cybersex trafficking victims in IJM's cases OR cases we've seen is 12 years old, and the youngest victim was a 2-month old baby. We will work alongside prosecutors to ensure new laws are enforced and a culture of accountability—not impunity—becomes reality.

## **Is “traditional” sex trafficking going underground and re-emerging or evolving into this kind of cybersex trafficking?**

No. Cybersex trafficking involves a different set of criminals and victims. The proliferation of the internet in developing countries like the Philippines makes it possible for pedophiles and predators *who would not have otherwise been able* to direct and purchase live-streamed child sexual abuse online. The traffickers located in the Philippines (who produce the abusive footage), pedophiles or other abusers located anywhere in the world (who purchase the abusive footage), and Filipino victims are different than those who are/were engaged in bar- and street-based child sex trafficking.

## **How does cybersex trafficking operate in the Philippines?**

Unlike in many street- or bar-based sex trafficking cases—in which customers are typically local men, foreigners living in the Philippines, or sex tourists seeking young women—criminals directing live abuse via the internet are abusers or pedophiles specifically looking for young children. These customers will use chat rooms and messaging services to purchase/trade child pornography, or to make connections with sellers located in a country like the Philippines who can offer a child to view live. Customers wire a secure payment online, anonymously and easily, to the trafficker in the Philippines.

The cybersex trafficker then sets up the exploitation. The abuse might take place in front of a mobile phone in a parked car, in the back room of an internet cafe, or in a closet or room in the trafficker's home. Most of the school-aged children in our cases were going about normal life, while being exploited in their home or neighborhood early in the morning or after school.

## **What is IJM's response?**

**Rescue:** We support Filipino and international law enforcement agencies (like U.S. Homeland Security) with investigations and on operations to rescue victims from cybersex trafficking and apprehend criminals.

**Restore:** We partner with government social services and private aftercare providers to help survivors heal. IJM social workers create customized treatment plans to meet each child's physical, mental and emotional needs. We help place survivors in aftercare homes where they can return to school or take vocational classes, and receive ongoing therapy. There are few organizations in the Philippines providing specialized services to meet the specific needs of survivors of cybersex trafficking, and our team will help shape best practices and pioneer new models in this field.

**Restrain:** IJM lawyers help public prosecutors build legal cases against the criminals producing the abusive footage. The Philippines has a strong anti-trafficking law, plus laws against child pornography and

cybercrimes. As our model has proven, the crime will decrease if criminals actually start going to jail. Until then, criminals will keep making money by trafficking children for the purpose of online sexual exploitation.

**Repair:** Our vision is to protect children in the Philippines from ever being exploited in the first place. By mentoring and training justice system officials—police, prosecutors, judges and social service providers—we will strengthen the system so it protects those who need help most, and so criminals and pedophiles fear real consequences.

### **How do I process (and help others process) this horrific crime?**

When we engage in any form of sin or brokenness that feels particularly dark to us, we should do so with four tools at our disposal: clarity, honesty, hope, and community.

**Clarity:** The very first thing to remember is that though we are often surprised and horrified by sin when we discover it in ourselves or in the world, sin is never a surprise to God. Scripture is clear that God sees and hears the cries of the vulnerable even when we don't (e.g. Psalm 10:14-18). And God is mobilizing and equipping the church to engage bringing rescue, restoration, restraint, and repair (Isaiah 1:17, Matthew 25:31-40). This work is God's responsibility—not ours. God has invited us to join this divine mission in order to give us life and purpose.

**Honesty:** Engaging this form of violence will often cause both psychological and theological turbulence for us. It is vital that we deal with these honestly by doing at least two things: First we should be quick to seek the support of friends and professionals whenever necessary. Isolating ourselves when we are feeling crushed by despair is unhealthy and counterproductive. Second, we should speak brutally honestly with God about the questions and feelings that arise in the context of cybersex trafficking. In biblical language this is called *lament*. We bring our true and unvarnished feelings and questions before God honestly, and in faith, and we expect that God will respond.

**Hope:** If we are to be sustained in this work, much of that sustenance will come via a steady diet of hope. It will be important to reconnect often with the *clarity* mentioned above, and to connect ourselves with the stories of miraculous rescue and restoration that God is already accomplishing in the world.

**Community:** We should never attempt this work alone. The support of faithful, praying, loving friends in this journey will be vital to us. If we lack community in this work, we should find it, or build it.

## **Prayer Requests**

**Pray for young boys and girls who are suffering in secret right now in the Philippines.** Children who are victims of cybersex trafficking are often being abused by relatives or neighbors, and building cases takes time and patience. Pray that IJM's teams (based in Cebu and Manila) would have discernment and favor as they develop cases and work with local law enforcement across the country to locate these children.

**Please pray for IJM and our partners seeking to rescue children from urgent situations of cybersex trafficking in the Philippines.** Pray for clear communications between all the relevant agencies, for quick action when called upon, and for God's leading so we could find all the children in need of rescue.

**Pray for favor and good collaboration between IJM and partners** as we continue to discuss partnering on important initiatives that will improve prosecutions and global coordination on combatting cybersex trafficking of children. Because this crime is happening online—with children being abused in the Philippines for customers located anywhere in the world to watch—a global response is critical.

**Please pray for more aftercare partners in the Philippines to serve young boys and girls who are survivors of cybersex trafficking.** Ask God to raise up qualified aftercare partners who can provide the specialized, trauma-informed care that survivors of abuse and exploitation need to heal.

**Pray for all those who have been rescued from cybersex trafficking.** Pray for the journey ahead of these survivors—that God would bring healing, freedom and restoration.

## **Next Steps**

1. Visit [www.IJM.org/IFLOCAL](http://www.IJM.org/IFLOCAL) for more resources
2. Visit [www.IJM.org/IF2019](http://www.IJM.org/IF2019) to sign up to be an IJM Freedom Partner
3. **Text IFISTAND to 52886** and receive simple actions that you can take to help end the trafficking and slavery of children.