

# Introduction

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Child Sexual Abuse (CSA) is “a complex phenomenon occurring for multiple reasons, in various ways, and in different relationships within families, peer groups, institutions, and communities” (Mathews & Collin-Vézina, 2019, p. 131). It encompasses various forms of sexual behaviors towards children, which may include a wide range of behaviors like consuming CSA exploitation material (CSEM, colloquially known as child pornography), sexualized conversations, unwanted physical contact up to sexual violence (Gottfried et al., 2020; Ioannou et al., 2018; World Health Organization, 1999). CSA is likely to cause devastating short- and long-term consequences for affected persons (Barth et al., 2013). For instance, some of them may suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder (Briggs & Joyce, 1997; Filipas & Ullman, 2006; Rowan & Foy, 1993), major depressive disorder (Lindert et al., 2014), or anxiety disorder (Lindert et al., 2014; Maniglio, 2013) while others tend to show self-injurious behavior (Liu et al., 2018), substance abuse (Lown et al., 2011; Smith et al., 2014), or problems in forming functional relationships (Davis & Petretic-Jackson, 2000; Mullen et al., 1994). Those consequences depend on factors like severity, frequency, relationship to the offender, reaction when confiding the incident, and feelings of guilt and shame (Zimmermann et al., 2011).

Based on the diversity of the phenomenon and its consequences, it is not surprising that there is still no uniform definition of CSA. Even though there exists no agreement about the definition of CSA, there exists an awareness of CSA as a “preventable public health problem” (Fix et al., 2021, p. 1). Depending on its definition, approximately 3 % to 31 % of children are affected worldwide (Barth et al., 2013). Around 16,000 cases of CSA were registered by the police in Germany in 2019 (Deutscher Kinderverein, 2020). Even if this number of registered cases appears to be very large, experts assume that the number of unreported cases is many times higher (London et al., 2005). Comparing the prevalence in Germany (approx. 13.9 %; Witt et al., 2017) with the cases registered to the police mentioned above, it is evident that there is a discrepancy between prevalence and reported cases.

Given the severe consequences for those affected and the significant difference between prevalence and police-reported cases, the primary goal in society should be to protect children from CSA by raising awareness of CSA as a preventable public health problem and establishing prevention services. Nevertheless, CSA remains a socially tabooed topic that is reluctant to be discussed (e.g., Goldschmidt-Gjerløw, 2019; Nielsen, 2016) and loaded with myths as well as stereotypes: For instance, many assume that CSA offenders are exclusively stranger males with a pedophilic preference, while, in fact, in most CSA cases the offenders and victims know each other very well (e.g., Finkelhor et al., 2005), which additionally increases the barrier for affected children and adolescents to confide in someone (Schaeffer et al., 2011). Furthermore, not all offenders have a sexual preference for children. Studies indicate that in a substantial number of cases, the offender does not have a pedophilic preference (Seto, 2008, 2009, 2017), and it can be assumed that a considerable part of persons with pedophilia do not sexually act out towards children (Cantor & McPhail, 2016). Moreover, even though most offenders are male adults, female offenders (Darling & Christensen, 2020) and peer/juvenile offenders are also prevalent (Keelan & Fremouw, 2013). Besides all these offender misconceptions, many are not aware of the dangers that exist for children in new media. For instance, internet-based technologies like social media offer various opportunities for the sexual exploitation of children (Babchishin et al., 2011). Studies indicate that these mostly anonymous and unregulated online environments are increasingly used to collect and distribute images or videos of child sexual abuse or to lure potential victims (e.g., Gottfried et al., 2020; Kloess et al., 2014; Whittle et al., 2013; Wolak et al., 2008).

The described misconceptions and knowledge gaps indicate that within society there is a perception of CSA that cannot be traced back to one's own experiences or substantiated through empirical results. At the same time, media coverage is often cited as a reason for the many misconceptions about the topic (e.g., Cromer & Goldsmith, 2010; Kitzinger, 2004; Popović, 2018; Döring & Walter, 2020) while providing a central source for the public (e.g., Babatsikos, 2010; Goldman & Grimbeek, 2015; Kitzinger, 2004). By consuming media coverage about CSA, especially people who did not experience CSA gain second-hand experiences. Unfortunately, several content analyses demonstrated that media coverage about CSA is biased by focusing on spectacular cases, while news on prevention strategies are rare (e.g., Kitzinger, 2004; Kitzinger & Skidmore, 1995; McCartan, 2004; Mejia et al., 2012). Moreover, by focusing media coverage on spectacular cases, media coverage perpetuates existing myths and spreads incorrect

beliefs about the characteristics of victims and offenders (e.g., Cromer & Goldsmith, 2010). Additionally, it may reinforce stigmata (e.g., Jones et al., 2010) and cause distress through insensitive treatment of those affected (Jones et al., 2010; Maercker & Mehr, 2006).

However, media production also depends on various circumstances like journalists' working conditions or recipients' needs, which also impact the way of reporting (e.g., Loosen et al., 2020; Loosen & Schmidt, 2012). Thus, it is essential to mention that insensitive or stigmatizing media coverage like the conflation of pedophilia and pedosexual behavior also results due to a lack of expert knowledge and the fact that such complex topics as paraphilias are hard to comprehend within a short news article (Ischebeck et al., 2021; Stelzmann et al., 2020). Furthermore, media reporting is usually directed at an audience (e.g., Couldry, 2011). It is evident that sensitive reporting needs recipients just as much as sensational articles do. Media agendas and audience agendas create mutually reinforcing dynamics (Maurer, 2016). This demonstrates that more is needed than just improved newspaper articles: There has to be an education of society, which can be supported by media reporting.

In sum, media coverage about CSA which is balanced and does not focus on extreme cases but also reports about prevention has the potential to provide the public with essential information and thereby educate about CSA (Dewi et al., 2021). In addition, it can exert pressure on political actors or institutions to take action (e.g., Donnelly & Inglis, 2010). Affected children need help in drawing public attention to their suffering and experiences. Here, media have the potential to support them, to act as communicators of prevention and drivers of social discourse.

### Aims of the book

What is missing from our point of view is an overview of the current state of research on media coverage of CSA. Therefore, the book aims to create an initial framework for this, compile internationally and interdisciplinary relevant research findings, and derive initial conclusions and recommendations for a diverse and interdisciplinary audience. Due to the complexity of the topic itself, this book cannot cover all facets. Nevertheless, we see it as an attempt to anchor an intersection between scientific evidence and media production as well as to smooth the way for collaborations, which are needed for effective prevention and intervention in this public health issue. After all, an easily accessible, evidence-based body of information is needed so that parties from politics, media, science, and related areas

can work together to address CSA. We hope that this book will help generate further research contributions on the topic and advance the linkage between journalism and science. For this reason, it is explicitly addressed not only to scientists but also to journalists, politicians, and further related stakeholders, who all can use their potential to initiate decisive changes. With this book about CSA and the media we want to draw attention to the perspectives of significant parties, to possible risks and opportunities of media coverage, and to ideas for improvement.

### Findings of the contributions in the book

In this book we intend to address the role of traditional media (e.g., newspaper) as well as new media (e.g., social media platforms) in the context of the complex phenomenon of CSA. Since the chapters focus on CSA from different perspectives, it is divided into two thematic parts.

**The first part of the book** focuses on the **media as communicator**, starting with reflecting the media coverage of CSA. It begins with the chapter by Nicola Döring, who presents findings on CSA representations in several media channels. Besides investigating quality criteria for traditional media articles, Nicola Döring also examines how CSA is covered in stock photos and on YouTube. Since CSA is often linked to the Catholic Church, Tereza Zavadilová explores how church-related newspapers report on CSA by comparing the Vatican's official media channel with an independent church publisher.

Furthermore, this book focuses on media effects evoked by media coverage on affected persons like victims, survivors, and their close contacts. The chapter by Adrian Etzel and colleagues presents reactions of victims/survivors on the media campaign "Those who break the silence break the power of the perpetrators", which encouraged affected persons to tell their stories and make political demands. By addressing the perspectives, experiences, and expectations of victims, respectively survivors, of the media coverage of CSA, Bianca Nagel and Barbara Kavemann present results of a mixed-method approach. Fatma Çelik and Beyza Karabaş investigate the knowledge and thematic media consumption of social workers in training who are professionals working with at-risk groups (Bange, 2015).

Moreover, this book addresses on the media effects on other involved groups. By presenting results of a content analysis on the media coverage of offenders, Stjepka Popović discusses their potential consequences. As journalists play a key role in media reporting of CSA, we provide insights

on how journalists deal with CSA in their daily work based on a qualitative survey.

To give insight into the topic from a practitioner's point of view, in addition to the empirical findings and to provide concrete handouts, the book contains a journalistic guideline, an interview with public relations practitioners, and an essay of a journalist. In detail, due to the sensitivity of the topic, Stjepka Popović proposes comprehensive guidelines for media handling of CSA in order to provide a more ethical and realistic media coverage without perpetuating myths and stereotypes. Given the fact that media coverage often conflated CSA offender and pedophilia, we interviewed Jens Wagner and Maximilian von Heyden, who work(ed) for the public relation section of the German prevention network "Kein Täter werden" (translation: "Don't Offend"), which offers anonymously therapeutic help for persons who are sexually attracted to children. As journalists are key actors while reporting about CSA, we also wish to highlight the media's handling of CSA from the journalist's point of view. Nina Apin, a long-time reporter in forensic contexts, writes about her experiences and addresses the opportunities and difficulties journalists may face.

As the first part of the book mainly focuses on the links between traditional media and CSA, the **second part of the book** addresses new media and their connection to CSA. Thereby it focuses on **new media as a possibility to prevention and supportive measures as well as a platform for CSA**. As a starting point, Edith Huber gives comprehensive insights into the development of "child pornography" (Child sexual exploitation material; CSEM) on the Internet. Besides the distribution of CSEM, the digital transformation also brings new opportunities for offenders to contact potential children directly. For this reason, Jimmy Sanderson and Melinda Weathers describe in their review the intersection of CSA in sport through digital technology. Next to the negative consequences, new media also raises the opportunity for people who experienced CSA to seek support and like-minded people. In their chapter, Simone Eelmaa and Maria Murumaa-Mengel investigate the conditions under which victims, who disclose their CSA experiences to the online community, do or do not receive support in unmoderated forums by identifying specific characteristics and social constructions. At the same time, new media also serve as platform for persons with pedophilia to exchange with like-minded. Therefore, the book concludes with the chapter by Mikkel Rask Pedersen, who observed interaction dynamics within forums for minor-attracted persons (persons with pedophilia) and discusses the function of forums as a

platform to facilitate coping strategies as well as a place where unfavorable dynamics can also create circles of justification.

### Conclusions and future directions

This book attempts to shed light on the connections between CSA and the media in different ways by involving various studies and perspectives from practitioners. However, the book does not claim to cover all topics. There are still many research desiderata in this area that currently receive little or no attention (e.g., darknet, misuse of children's images from social media, media portrayal of female offenders, re-traumatization due to journalistic interviews). Nevertheless, the book offers a comprehensive overview of relevant aspects that are addressed in connection with CSA and the media. For this reason, we would like to thank persons and institutions that provided the realization of this book in various ways. First of all, we would like to express our thanks to the authors, whose work highlight different aspects of the topic and thus help the book to reflect the diversity of the subject matter. We would also like to thank Mr. Rörig, who wrote the preface and thus provided an insight into his work as Independent Commissioner for Child Sexual Abuse Issues. Furthermore, we are indebted to the Freie Universität Berlin for the financial support and Sandra Frey as well as Eva Lang from NOMOS, who provided us with advice and support at all times during the preparation of the book. Finally, we would like to thank our colleagues, families, and friends who have supported this book project from the beginning and who were, despite the sensitive subject, always willing to talk with us about the different aspects of CSA and media.

CSA remains an intra-societal phenomenon that needs to be further raised in people's awareness. Prevention can only succeed if we manage to establish evidence-based knowledge at both the individual and societal level and treat those affected by CSA with respect and openness. Media coverage has the potential to make a significant contribution to this. This requires better networking between journalists, the scientific community, and related areas. It is not enough to expect journalists to inform themselves comprehensively about CSA and report adequately. It is also the duty of science, politics, and stakeholders to support journalists in this endeavor.

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