

How to cite this article:
Shakir Abd, L. & Akrami, R. (2026). The Crime of Child Exploitation in Online Pornography under Iraqi and Iranian Law: A Comparative Legal Study. *Journal of Historical Research, Law and Policy, 4*(5), 1-18. https://doi.org/10.61838/jhrlp.486

Article history:
Original Research

Dates:
Submission Date: 10 June 2026
Revision Date: 08 August 2026
Acceptance Date: 16 August 2026
Pubication Date: 01 October 2026

The Crime of Child Exploitation in Online Pornography under Iraqi and Iranian Law: A Comparative Legal Study

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ABSTRACT

The exploitation of children in online pornography represents one of the most serious contemporary forms of sexual abuse because digital technologies facilitate the production, storage, reproduction, transmission, and repeated circulation of exploitative material across national borders. This study examines the legal regulation of child exploitation in online pornography under Iraqi and Iranian law and evaluates the adequacy of the criminal protection afforded to child victims in both legal systems. The study adopts a descriptive-analytical and comparative approach, focusing on the concept and forms of online child pornography, the material and mental elements of the relevant offences, criminalized forms of conduct, sanctions, procedural safeguards, victim protection, compensation, and preventive measures. The findings indicate that Iraqi law addresses child sexual exploitation through a combination of general provisions concerning public morality, indecent material, prostitution, and juvenile protection, but lacks a sufficiently comprehensive and specialized framework covering all forms of online child pornography. By contrast, Iranian law provides more specific protection through legislation that expressly criminalizes several forms of sexual exploitation involving children and adolescents, including the production, distribution, reproduction, display, sale, possession, storage, and electronic circulation of obscene or indecent material, as well as certain forms of sexual communication with children in cyberspace. Despite this relative legislative advantage, both legal systems continue to face challenges concerning digital evidence, cross-border investigation, rapid removal of illegal material, confidentiality of child victims, psychological rehabilitation, and compensation for continuing harm. The study concludes that effective legal protection requires an integrated child-centered framework combining precise criminalization, specialized cybercrime investigation, victim-sensitive procedures, psychological and social support, compensation, preventive mechanisms, and stronger judicial and technical cooperation between Iraq and Iran.

Keywords: *Child Exploitation; Online Pornography; Child Sexual Abuse; Cybercrime; Criminal Protection; Iraqi Law; Iranian Law; Comparative Law.*

Introduction

The expansion of digital communication has fundamentally altered the forms, methods, and geographical reach of crimes involving the sexual exploitation of children. Whereas traditional forms of sexual exploitation were ordinarily dependent on physical proximity between the offender and the victim, digital technologies have created environments in which the exploitation of a child may be initiated, facilitated, recorded, reproduced, transmitted, stored, and repeatedly circulated without the offender and victim necessarily remaining in the same physical

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location. The Internet, social networking services, instant-messaging applications, cloud storage, video-sharing platforms, and other electronic communication systems have therefore transformed child pornography from a predominantly localized form of abuse into a potentially transnational and continuously reproducible criminal phenomenon. The significance of this transformation is not merely technological. It changes the nature of the harm experienced by the child because the original sexual exploitation may be followed by an indefinite period during which images or recordings remain accessible, are copied by unknown persons, migrate between platforms, or are redistributed in multiple jurisdictions. Naji explains that unlawful uses of the Internet create distinctive difficulties for criminal law because electronic networks facilitate anonymity, rapid transmission, and the crossing of territorial boundaries in ways that complicate both detection and prosecution (1). Within the specific context of child sexual exploitation, Saif emphasizes that the Internet provides offenders with unprecedented opportunities for obtaining, exchanging, and disseminating sexual material involving children while reducing many of the practical obstacles associated with traditional forms of distribution (2). The digital character of the offence therefore requires a legal framework capable of addressing not only the initial act of exploiting the child but also the subsequent handling, possession, storage, transmission, publication, and recirculation of the resulting material.

The seriousness of child exploitation in online pornography derives from the nature of the protected interests that the offence violates. Such conduct is not merely an offence against public morality or social decency. It constitutes an attack on the dignity, bodily integrity, privacy, psychological security, sexual autonomy, reputation, and healthy development of the child. The child is transformed from a person entitled to special legal protection into an object of sexual consumption and digital circulation. Georgy treats sexual exploitation of children as a particularly severe form of violence because the vulnerability associated with childhood magnifies the consequences of coercion, manipulation, deception, and abuse of authority (3). The danger becomes even greater in the digital environment because the child may be harmed repeatedly whenever the material is viewed, copied, exchanged, or republished. Abd al-Aal observes that online child sexual exploitation cannot be understood solely through the original abusive act because electronic dissemination creates an additional dimension of victimization in which the consequences continue beyond the moment of production (4). This continuing character distinguishes online pornography from many conventional offences in which the criminal act ends when the direct conduct ceases. A digital image may survive the prosecution of the original offender, the removal of one website, or even the passage of many years. The permanence and reproducibility of electronic material thus produce a continuing threat to the child's privacy and psychological recovery.

The legal problem becomes particularly significant when criminal legislation was originally designed for offences committed through conventional means. Criminal statutes based on concepts such as obscene publication, prostitution, indecent material, public morality, or traditional sexual assault may cover certain aspects of online child exploitation, but they may fail to distinguish clearly between adult pornography and pornography involving children, between possession and distribution, between mere access and deliberate storage, or between direct sexual abuse and preparatory online communication intended to facilitate exploitation. The general principle of legality requires criminal conduct to be defined with sufficient clarity so that both individuals and courts can identify the scope of prohibited behavior. Abd al-Latif's analysis of Iraqi criminal policy emphasizes that criminalization must be connected to clearly determined legal interests and must provide an adequate legal basis for penal intervention (5). Where modern technological conduct is forced into older and more general provisions, problems may arise concerning interpretation, proof, proportionality, and the limits of judicial extension. Such difficulties are particularly

important in Iraq, where the legal response to child pornography has traditionally relied heavily on general criminal provisions concerning morality, indecent material, incitement to prostitution, and related forms of sexual exploitation. By contrast, Iranian legislation has progressively developed more specific rules concerning children and adolescents, including forms of exploitation occurring through cyberspace. Hosseini, Abadi, and Niniz demonstrate that Iranian law has moved toward a more differentiated approach to pornography by regulating conduct associated with the production and circulation of obscene and indecent material through criminal legislation (6). The comparative examination of the two systems therefore provides an opportunity to assess how different legislative techniques respond to substantially similar forms of digital harm.

The offence must also be examined from a victimological perspective. Children subjected to online pornography cannot be treated simply as evidentiary sources in criminal proceedings. Their age, psychological condition, dependence on adults, fear of disclosure, possible relationship with the offender, and vulnerability to secondary victimization require procedural and protective mechanisms that differ from those ordinarily applicable to adult victims. Rayejian Asli places supportive victimology at the center of a criminal justice approach that recognizes the victim's need for legal, psychological, social, and compensatory protection rather than limiting criminal policy to punishment of the offender (7). Javan Jafari Bojnourdi and Ghatloui Toroghi likewise emphasize the importance of professional social support for child and adolescent victims within the criminal justice process because the effects of victimization frequently extend beyond the legal proceedings themselves (8). These considerations are especially important in cases involving online pornography, where investigation and trial may require viewing, preserving, describing, or presenting highly sensitive digital evidence. Without child-sensitive procedures, the justice process itself may reproduce aspects of the original harm by repeatedly exposing the child to the circumstances of exploitation or by unnecessarily disclosing identifying information.

The distinction between prevention and reaction is equally important. Criminal punishment is indispensable, but punishment alone does not provide a comprehensive response to online exploitation. Preventive criminal policy seeks to reduce opportunities for abuse, strengthen family and institutional awareness, regulate access to harmful digital content, create reporting channels, develop specialized investigative capabilities, and intervene before abuse escalates. Al-Shadhili explains that modern criminological prevention is not confined to deterrence through sanctions but includes social and institutional measures directed at reducing the conditions that facilitate offending (9). Behnam similarly identifies prevention and correction as complementary dimensions of criminal policy, particularly when vulnerable groups and juvenile-related harms are involved (10). In the online environment, such prevention must be adapted to technological realities. It requires cooperation among law-enforcement authorities, prosecutors, courts, schools, families, Internet service providers, digital platforms, social services, and healthcare professionals. At the same time, prevention should not become a justification for disproportionate surveillance or restrictions that undermine lawful communication. The central legal task is to establish effective safeguards against child exploitation while preserving the principle that criminal intervention must remain clearly defined, proportionate, and subject to judicial control.

The present study therefore aims to analyze comparatively the crime of child exploitation in online pornography under Iraqi and Iranian law, with particular attention to the definition of the prohibited conduct, the material and mental elements of relevant offences, the range of criminalized activities, sanctions, victim protection, procedural safeguards, compensation, prevention, and the principal deficiencies that remain within each legal system. The study is confined to conduct directly connected with the exploitation of children in pornographic material through

digital or Internet-based means. Broader questions of juvenile delinquency, general family discipline, ordinary educational policy, and unrelated forms of moral regulation are considered only where they bear directly on protection against online sexual exploitation. The central research problem is whether the existing Iraqi and Iranian legal frameworks provide sufficiently clear, comprehensive, and technologically responsive criminal protection against the production, possession, storage, publication, distribution, and circulation of pornographic material involving children and against online communication intended to facilitate sexual exploitation. The analysis adopts a descriptive-analytical approach to the relevant criminal and protective rules and a comparative approach to identifying convergence, divergence, and legislative gaps. It argues that both systems recognize the gravity of child sexual exploitation, but that Iranian law has developed a more specialized framework for particular forms of digital exploitation, whereas Iraqi law continues to depend more extensively on general provisions whose application to technologically evolving conduct may be incomplete or uncertain.

Conceptual and Legal Framework of Child Exploitation in Online Pornography

A coherent criminal-law analysis must begin by distinguishing child pornography from broader categories such as obscenity, pornography involving adults, prostitution, indecent publication, and sexual assault. The essential element that gives child pornography its distinctive criminal character is the involvement of a child in sexualized material or representation and the corresponding exploitation of the child's vulnerability for the sexual gratification, commercial benefit, or other purposes of another person. Child pornography may involve photographs, films, audiovisual recordings, digital images, electronic files, or other representations depicting a child engaged in sexual activity or displaying the child's sexual organs for sexual purposes. Saif describes the sexual exploitation of children through the Internet as encompassing the use of children in sexually explicit material and the subsequent circulation of that material through electronic networks (2). Abd al-Aal similarly treats the offence as a composite phenomenon in which the abuse of the child and the technological dissemination of the resulting representation may constitute interconnected but legally distinguishable stages (4). The offence therefore cannot be reduced to the physical act that produced the image. It may continue through later conduct performed by persons who had no involvement in the original abuse but knowingly possess, store, distribute, sell, upload, exchange, or otherwise circulate the material.

The concept of exploitation is central to this distinction. Exploitation implies that the child is used as a means for another person's sexual, commercial, or illicit purpose. It may arise through force, threats, deception, manipulation, grooming, abuse of trust, payment, inducement, or misuse of authority. Because children do not possess the same legal and developmental capacity as adults, apparent cooperation by a child cannot automatically remove the exploitative character of the conduct. Georgy emphasizes that child sexual exploitation frequently occurs within relationships of dependency or vulnerability in which the child's apparent behavior cannot be interpreted through the same assumptions applied to autonomous adult decision-making (3). Ismail's examination of sexual exploitation through social networks further indicates that digital environments enable offenders to establish contact gradually, create emotional dependence, conceal their identities, and manipulate children before explicit sexual requests are made (11). Online exploitation may therefore begin well before the production of pornographic material. Communication intended to obtain intimate images, persuade a child to perform sexual acts before a camera, or arrange an unlawful sexual encounter may constitute preparatory or independent criminal conduct depending on the applicable legislation.

The Internet changes both the structure and the scale of the offence. In traditional offences involving obscene material, production, possession, and distribution were often physically separate activities requiring identifiable objects such as photographs, films, books, or magazines. Digital technologies collapse many of these distinctions. A person who receives a file may simultaneously create a copy on a device; a user who uploads a file to a platform may distribute it instantaneously to thousands of persons; automated synchronization may create additional stored copies; and encrypted communications may enable exchange between offenders located in different countries. Naji notes that cybercrime is characterized by speed, technical complexity, difficulty of territorial attribution, and the possibility that evidence may be altered or destroyed rapidly (1). These features are particularly relevant to child pornography because investigators must determine not only whether prohibited material existed but also who created, knowingly possessed, transferred, or intentionally made it available. The legal categories of production, possession, storage, transmission, publication, and distribution therefore require interpretation adapted to electronic environments.

Possession is among the most difficult concepts in this context. In a physical setting, possession generally presupposes control over an identifiable object. In cyberspace, material may appear temporarily in cache files, automated downloads, messaging applications, or cloud storage without the user necessarily intending to retain it. A sound criminal-law approach should therefore distinguish knowing and intentional possession from purely accidental or technically automatic storage. The mental element becomes essential because criminal liability should not ordinarily be imposed merely because prohibited data passed through or temporarily appeared on a device without awareness or control. Criminalization should focus on deliberate acquisition, retention, organization, repeated access, downloading, or other conduct demonstrating conscious dominion over the material. This approach is consistent with the broader criminal-law principle that penal responsibility should correspond to voluntary and culpable conduct. Abd al-Latif's discussion of criminal policy underlines the importance of connecting punishment to legally attributable conduct rather than expanding liability beyond the personal basis of responsibility (5). In online pornography cases, technical evidence concerning file histories, user activity, storage patterns, repeated access, account credentials, and communications may therefore become important for establishing the required knowledge and intent.

Publication and distribution likewise acquire broader meanings online. Publication may occur by posting material on an openly accessible website or social-media account, but distribution may also take place within private groups, encrypted channels, peer-to-peer networks, or direct messaging systems. A narrow legal definition based only on public display would fail to capture significant forms of circulation. Abd al-Aal recognizes that Internet-based exploitation includes multiple forms of transmission that may occur publicly or privately and that criminalization must therefore address the functional act of making the material available rather than rely exclusively on traditional concepts of publication (4). Similarly, Naji's treatment of Internet offences indicates that the networked nature of digital communication makes conventional distinctions between sender, publisher, distributor, and possessor increasingly difficult to maintain (1). Legislation must consequently employ sufficiently broad but precise terminology to encompass uploading, transferring, sharing, sending, displaying, selling, offering, circulating, reproducing, and storing material where these activities are performed knowingly in relation to child pornography.

Another significant concept is the continuing nature of harm. The initial abuse may occur once, but the digital representation can persist indefinitely. Every subsequent circulation may expose the child to renewed humiliation, fear, reputational injury, and psychological distress. Malekizadeh's discussion of victim compensation reflects the

broader principle that criminal harm may extend beyond tangible physical loss and may include non-material forms of injury requiring legal recognition (12). Gholami similarly addresses the importance of recognizing personal dignity and non-physical interests within systems of legal protection (13). In cases involving child pornography, the injury is particularly difficult to contain because the victim cannot easily regain control over material once it has entered digital networks. Removal from one platform does not guarantee disappearance from others. The possibility of future rediscovery may itself constitute a continuing source of anxiety. This characteristic supports the need for legal remedies that include not only punishment and financial compensation but also rapid removal mechanisms, confidentiality safeguards, psychological services, and specialized assistance.

The age and status of the victim must also be clearly determined. Child-protection legislation ordinarily attaches special legal consequences to persons below a defined age threshold, but legal systems may employ different concepts such as child, minor, juvenile, or adolescent. The importance of precision is particularly evident in sexual offences, where age may affect the validity of consent, the severity of punishment, procedural safeguards, and the competence of specialized authorities. Mosaffa and Davar's examination of children's rights emphasizes that the legal status of childhood entails enhanced obligations of care and protection because children require safeguards appropriate to their developmental condition (14). Javanmard also identifies specialized criminal protection as a necessary component of Iranian child-protection policy because general criminal rules may not adequately reflect the distinctive vulnerability of children (15). For online pornography, the child's age should therefore be an integral component of the offence and should not be left uncertain by reliance on general obscenity provisions designed for the population as a whole.

The offender may occupy many different positions in the criminal process. One offender may directly coerce or persuade the child to participate in sexual activity; another may record it; another may edit or reproduce the material; another may upload or sell it; and yet another may knowingly obtain and retain it for personal use. Criminal law must determine whether these actors commit separate offences or participate in a single broader criminal enterprise. Saif notes that Internet-based child sexual exploitation often involves networks in which different participants perform specialized roles in acquiring, producing, and distributing prohibited material (2). The criminal responsibility of facilitators is consequently important, particularly where an individual knowingly provides technological, logistical, or financial assistance. At the same time, liability should remain tied to intentional contribution. A platform, telecommunications provider, or technical intermediary should not automatically be equated with a direct offender merely because its infrastructure was misused; the relevant inquiry must concern knowledge, legal duties, failure to act where required, and the specific statutory framework.

A further conceptual distinction concerns the relationship between pornography and sexual grooming. Not every sexually exploitative online conversation immediately produces pornographic material, yet communication with a child may be designed to achieve that result. Ismail's analysis of social-network exploitation indicates that offenders may use prolonged interaction to normalize sexual discussion, obtain trust, request intimate material, or gradually overcome resistance (11). Legislation capable of addressing only the final production or distribution of pornography may therefore intervene too late. Iranian law's specific attention to communication with children in cyberspace for sexual purposes reflects an effort to criminalize an earlier stage of exploitative conduct. Such an approach strengthens prevention but also requires careful definition so that criminal liability is based on demonstrable sexual purpose rather than ambiguous or innocent communication.

The concept of online child pornography should finally be distinguished from general concerns about morally harmful content. While obscene or indecent adult material may be regulated according to public morality, child pornography requires a victim-centered rationale based on exploitation and abuse. Treating child pornography merely as an offence against morality risks obscuring the individual child as the direct victim. Hosseini and colleagues' examination of pornography within Iranian law demonstrates that obscenity-based regulation and child-protection regulation may overlap but do not necessarily protect the same legal interests (6). A child-centered legal framework should therefore emphasize dignity, bodily and psychological integrity, privacy, development, and freedom from sexual exploitation. This distinction becomes central to the comparative evaluation of Iraqi and Iranian law because the relative reliance on morality-based provisions in Iraq and more specific child-protection provisions in Iran produces different levels of clarity concerning the object of criminal protection.

Criminalization of Online Child Pornographic Exploitation under Iraqi and Iranian Law

The Iraqi legal framework addresses online child pornography through a combination of general penal provisions and broader legislation concerning juveniles, morality, prostitution, and protection from harmful conduct. The principal weakness of this framework is the absence, within the traditional Penal Code structure, of a comprehensive and technologically specific offence covering all stages of child pornography. Iraqi Penal Code No. 111 of 1969 was enacted before the Internet and therefore reflects conventional concepts of obscene material, public morality, sexual conduct, and incitement. Article 403, as discussed in the thesis, provides a basis for punishing the production, importation, publication, possession for distribution, or display of material contrary to public morals, but it is not specifically constructed around the sexual exploitation of children. This means that the offence is conceptually centered on obscenity or public morality rather than the distinct harm caused to a child whose body or sexual conduct has been converted into pornographic material. Abd al-Latif's analysis of Iraqi criminal policy illustrates the historical reliance of the Penal Code on classifications connected to social order and public morality (5). Such provisions remain capable of application to certain forms of online pornography, but they do not provide the detailed taxonomy of child-specific conduct increasingly required in the digital environment.

The limitations of this approach become particularly visible when considering the diversity of acts now associated with online child pornography. The production of an image, its possession, deliberate downloading, electronic storage, private exchange, sale, public uploading, reposting, transmission through encrypted channels, or communication with a child for the purpose of obtaining sexual material are factually different acts and may involve different offenders. A general provision prohibiting indecent publication may clearly cover some forms of public dissemination but leave uncertainty concerning private possession or technologically mediated forms of exchange. Saif emphasizes that effective criminalization of Internet-based sexual exploitation requires legislation to address the different stages through which pornographic material is created and circulated (2). Abd al-Aal similarly argues that the complexity of online exploitation necessitates legal provisions capable of distinguishing production, possession, distribution, and electronic communication rather than relying exclusively on traditional offences (4). The Iraqi framework therefore confronts a problem of legislative specificity: conduct may be socially and morally recognized as dangerous, yet the applicable criminal rule may not describe it with sufficient technological precision.

Iraqi law nevertheless contains provisions capable of addressing conduct connected with the sexual exploitation of minors. Rules criminalizing incitement to debauchery, prostitution, or sexual misconduct involving persons under eighteen provide an important basis for intervention where a child is induced or facilitated into sexual activity. These

provisions recognize the particular vulnerability of minors and may support aggravated punishment where the offender occupies a position of authority or where coercive circumstances exist. Yet prostitution-related offences do not fully correspond to child pornography. Pornographic exploitation may occur without prostitution in the conventional sense, may be non-commercial, or may involve remote coercion to produce images without physical contact between the offender and the child. Georgy notes that sexual exploitation encompasses a broader range of abuses than prostitution because exploitation may be achieved through different forms of pressure, manipulation, or use of the child's body and image (3). The use of prostitution provisions is therefore helpful but incomplete.

The historical position of Iraqi labour legislation also demonstrates the fragmented nature of the response. Earlier Iraqi labour rules expressly identified the exploitation of children in prostitution or pornographic performances among the worst forms of child labour, thereby recognizing pornography as a distinct form of exploitation. However, such provisions were located within labour regulation and did not establish a complete criminal framework for digital pornography. Hamad's examination of Iraqi legislation and child protection reflects the broader tendency of protective norms to be dispersed across several legislative instruments rather than consolidated within a specialized child-protection scheme (16). Fragmentation creates practical difficulties because investigators and courts must combine provisions designed for different purposes in order to respond to a technologically complex offence. It may also lead to inconsistent protection depending on whether the facts can be characterized as prostitution, indecency, exploitation, juvenile endangerment, or another established category.

Iranian law provides a more specialized structure. The Child and Adolescent Protection Law represents a significant development because it identifies forms of sexual exploitation involving children and adolescents and explicitly regulates conduct connected with obscene or indecent audiovisual material. The law does not confine liability to the person who directly produces pornographic material. It extends criminalization to using a child or adolescent in the production, distribution, reproduction, display, sale, or storage of such works and to other forms of handling content in which children are exploited. Hosseini and colleagues identify the increasing differentiation of pornography-related offences within Iranian criminal legislation, particularly where modern audiovisual and digital technologies are involved (6). The child-protection framework strengthens this approach by linking prohibited material directly to the exploitation of a child rather than treating the issue solely as an affront to public morality.

The Iranian model is also notable for extending criminalization into cyberspace through provisions concerning communication with children and adolescents for sexual purposes. This captures a stage that may precede the production of pornography. A person who intentionally contacts a child online in order to harass the child sexually, obtain unlawful sexual cooperation, or prepare for exploitative conduct may fall within a specific criminal prohibition even before explicit material is produced. Ismail's analysis of social-network exploitation demonstrates why such provisions are important: online offenders may cultivate relationships gradually, conceal their true identity, or exploit emotional dependence before requesting sexual images or meetings (11). The legal recognition of sexually motivated communication therefore allows intervention at an earlier stage and may reduce reliance on the occurrence of completed abuse.

The material element of the offence varies according to the form of conduct criminalized. In production offences, the material element may consist of photographing, filming, recording, creating, or otherwise generating sexually explicit content involving a child. In exploitation offences, it may consist of compelling, inducing, employing, hiring, persuading, or otherwise using the child for the creation of such content. In possession offences, the relevant conduct is conscious control over the prohibited material. In distribution offences, it involves transferring, publishing,

supplying, selling, displaying, uploading, or otherwise making the material available to others. The Iranian legislative approach is comparatively broad because it attempts to enumerate several forms of dealing with child-related obscene or indecent material. Nourbakhsh and Saraei's discussion of sexual offences involving minors demonstrates the importance of taking the victim's age and vulnerability into account when determining criminal responsibility and the seriousness of unlawful sexual conduct (17). Although their analysis is not confined to cybercrime, the underlying principle supports differentiated protection for minors in online sexual contexts.

The mental element generally requires knowledge and intention. A person who deliberately creates or distributes child pornography clearly acts with awareness of the relevant material, but more difficult cases arise in relation to storage, receipt, or possession. Criminal liability should require proof that the accused knew or was at least legally aware of the nature of the content and intentionally retained or controlled it. The principle of personal criminal responsibility prevents punishment for purely accidental receipt or automated technical processes unless legislation clearly establishes another basis of liability. Al-Shammari's discussion of preventive criminal policy, although directed to a different category of offences, emphasizes that preventive legislation must remain linked to defined criminal conduct and cannot abandon the fundamental safeguards of legality and individual responsibility (18). In child pornography cases, this requires courts to differentiate intentional possession from involuntary technological storage and to evaluate digital evidence carefully.

The offender's relationship to the child may justify aggravated punishment. Sexual exploitation by a parent, guardian, teacher, caregiver, employer, or other trusted person is especially serious because the offender abuses a position that should ordinarily provide protection. The vulnerability created by dependency reduces the child's ability to resist or report the conduct. Javanmard's analysis of criminal protection for children in Iran emphasizes the need for stronger responses where adults responsible for a child's welfare become the source of harm (15). The same reasoning applies in Iraq, where juvenile-protection legislation recognizes parental and guardian duties and provides legal consequences where those duties are seriously violated. However, provisions designed for neglect or juvenile delinquency should not substitute for specific aggravated offences where a guardian directly exploits the child in online pornography.

The comparative difference between the two systems is therefore not that one recognizes child exploitation while the other does not. Both recognize the need for criminal protection, and both contain provisions capable of addressing significant forms of abuse. The difference lies primarily in legislative technique, degree of specialization, and the range of conduct expressly addressed. Iranian legislation provides a clearer child-specific basis for criminalizing the use of children in obscene or indecent audiovisual works and for regulating several stages of electronic handling. Iraqi law remains more dependent on interpretation of general provisions. This dependency creates potential gaps where conduct is harmful but does not fit neatly within traditional categories. A person who knowingly stores large quantities of child pornography for personal use, for example, may present a different legal problem from one who publicly distributes obscene material. Similarly, a person who engages in online grooming for the purpose of obtaining sexual images may be intercepted before production occurs. Specialized legislation can define such conduct directly, whereas general provisions may require strained interpretation or reliance on attempt, incitement, or other doctrines.

Punishment also requires consideration of proportionality. The sanction should reflect the seriousness of the offence, the age and vulnerability of the victim, the offender's role, the scale of distribution, commercial motivation, repeated conduct, abuse of trust, and the degree of harm. Mohsen's study of individualized custodial penalties

emphasizes the importance of tailoring penal responses to the seriousness and characteristics of the criminal conduct rather than treating all offenders identically (19). In online child pornography, differentiation is particularly important because the offender who directly abuses a child for the purpose of producing material occupies a different position from a secondary possessor, even though possession itself may sustain the market for abuse and perpetuate victimization. Aggravating circumstances should therefore be clearly defined and should include direct participation in sexual abuse, exploitation of multiple children, organized or commercial activity, distribution to large networks, abuse of parental or professional authority, recidivism, and deliberate efforts to conceal or perpetuate the material.

The criminalization of child pornography must also be coordinated with procedural law. A substantive offence that cannot be effectively investigated may provide only symbolic protection. Digital evidence can be deleted, encrypted, transferred across borders, or stored remotely. Investigators therefore require lawful powers to preserve data, obtain relevant records, search electronic devices, identify accounts, and cooperate with service providers while respecting procedural guarantees. Sabri's commentary on criminal procedure emphasizes the role of procedural safeguards in ensuring that criminal investigation remains legally controlled and that evidence is obtained through recognized procedures (20). In cases involving children, those safeguards must operate alongside victim-protection measures. The objective is not simply to expand investigative powers but to develop specialized procedures that are both effective and legally accountable.

The Iraqi-Iranian comparison ultimately demonstrates the importance of moving from general morality-based regulation toward a child-centered cybercrime framework. Iraq's existing provisions provide important points of intervention but would benefit from a specialized statutory formulation defining child pornographic material, criminalizing intentional production, acquisition, possession, storage, distribution, transmission, sale, importation, exportation, publication, and recirculation, and addressing online communication undertaken for the purpose of sexual exploitation. Iran's framework is comparatively more detailed, but it too requires continuous adaptation because technologies and methods of dissemination change rapidly. Criminalization must remain technologically neutral enough to cover new platforms while sufficiently precise to satisfy legality. The comparative objective should therefore not be mechanical replication of one legal system by the other, but the development of a coherent legislative model in which the child is recognized as the direct victim, online conduct is explicitly addressed, and each stage of the exploitative process is subject to proportionate criminal liability.

Criminal Protection of Child Victims and Comparative Legislative Challenges

Effective protection against online child pornography extends beyond the definition of offences and penalties. Because the harm can arise before, during, and long after the production of pornographic material, criminal policy must combine prevention, early detection, investigation, prosecution, procedural protection, compensation, psychological care, and mechanisms designed to limit continued circulation. Preventive protection is particularly important because the child's vulnerability may make disclosure difficult and because digital exploitation can escalate rapidly once intimate material has been obtained. Al-Shadhili's account of criminological prevention recognizes that effective criminal policy requires measures operating before the completion of the offence and not merely punitive intervention afterward (9). Behnam likewise treats preventive intervention as part of a broader social response aimed at reducing circumstances conducive to criminal behavior (10). In the context of online child exploitation, prevention should focus directly on digital risks rather than on generalized moral discipline. Children,

families, schools, and professionals should be able to recognize grooming, coercive requests for images, threats involving intimate material, suspicious communications, and attempts to move children into private or encrypted channels.

Family protection remains relevant, but it should be framed in a rights-based rather than punitive manner. Parents and guardians can reduce risk through communication, age-appropriate supervision, education concerning online privacy, and early attention to behavioral changes associated with exploitation. Jaafar's discussion of juvenile protection highlights the importance of the family environment in shaping vulnerability and preventing harmful conduct (21). Yet excessive reliance on parental responsibility can be problematic because some offenders are themselves parents, relatives, or trusted adults. Legal policy must therefore avoid assuming that the family is always a safe environment. Where the suspected offender is a guardian, reporting and protective mechanisms must enable intervention independently of family consent. Iraqi juvenile legislation recognizes circumstances in which parental authority may be restricted or withdrawn when guardians seriously endanger the child, and Al-Saadi's analysis of the Juvenile Welfare Law illustrates the protective rationale underlying such intervention (22). In online pornography cases, similar protective principles should ensure the immediate removal of the child from dangerous conditions where exploitation originates within the household.

Schools and social institutions also have preventive and detection functions, although their role should be closely connected to child protection rather than generalized delinquency control. Beskri identifies schools as important institutions for recognizing changes in behavior, isolation, psychological distress, and other indicators that a child may be experiencing serious difficulties (23). Teachers and school counselors may be among the first adults outside the family to observe signs of online sexual exploitation. Effective policy should therefore provide clear referral mechanisms, confidentiality rules, professional training, and access to specialized child-protection authorities. Hamad's analysis of Iraqi child-protection legislation shows the importance of coordination between social, educational, and legal institutions where children face risks of harm (16). Such coordination should be modernized to include cyber-specific threats, particularly where children are being blackmailed with intimate images or manipulated through online contacts.

Reporting mechanisms are crucial because traditional reporting through police stations may be inaccessible or intimidating for child victims. Online portals, confidential hotlines, school-based reporting systems, and specialized child-protection units can lower barriers to disclosure. Reports should be capable of triggering rapid preservation of electronic evidence and immediate protective measures. Abd al-Aal emphasizes that the speed of Internet-based sexual exploitation requires correspondingly rapid institutional responses because harmful material may be disseminated widely within a short period (4). Delayed action can therefore increase both evidentiary loss and the extent of victimization. Iraqi and Iranian law would benefit from explicit procedural duties requiring competent authorities to preserve relevant digital data promptly upon receiving credible reports, while simultaneously safeguarding the child's identity.

The investigation of online child pornography requires specialized technical expertise. Ordinary investigative methods may be insufficient when offenders use encrypted applications, anonymous accounts, virtual private networks, cloud storage, or foreign-hosted services. Naji's analysis of Internet crime identifies the volatility and technical complexity of digital evidence as major challenges for criminal justice systems (1). Investigators must understand device forensics, metadata, account histories, network records, file-sharing systems, and evidentiary preservation. At the same time, technical capability must operate within lawful procedural boundaries. Sabri

stresses that procedural legitimacy is essential to the reliability of criminal adjudication and to protection of individual rights (20). Search, seizure, data preservation, interception, and access to private communications should therefore be governed by clear legal authorization, judicial oversight where appropriate, and rules ensuring integrity and chain of custody.

Cross-border cooperation presents another major challenge. A child may be located in Iraq, the offender in Iran, a platform in a third country, and the relevant server somewhere else entirely. The traditional territorial model of criminal jurisdiction becomes difficult when production, transmission, storage, and access occur in different States. Naji's characterization of cybercrime as inherently capable of crossing national boundaries applies directly to online pornography (1). Effective enforcement consequently depends on mechanisms for mutual legal assistance, rapid preservation requests, exchange of digital evidence, identification of users, and coordination between specialized police and prosecutorial authorities. Bilateral cooperation between Iraq and Iran could be particularly important because geographical proximity, cross-border movement, shared linguistic and cultural networks in some communities, and the regional character of digital communications may create cases involving both jurisdictions. Such cooperation should remain subject to human-rights guarantees and should not permit informal evidence gathering that undermines procedural legality.

The procedural treatment of the child victim requires special attention. Repeated questioning, confrontation with the accused, public disclosure of identifying information, unnecessary examination of explicit material, and insensitive courtroom procedures may cause secondary victimization. Rayejian Asli's supportive victimology framework emphasizes that criminal proceedings must be structured to reduce additional harm to victims rather than merely use them as instruments of proof (7). Javan Jafari Bojnourdi and Ghatloui Toroghi likewise highlight the role of social workers in assisting child and adolescent victims during criminal proceedings and facilitating communication with legal authorities (8). In online pornography cases, interviews should be conducted by trained professionals using child-sensitive techniques, recorded where legally permissible to reduce repetition, and limited to what is necessary for investigation and trial. The child's identity should be protected from public disclosure, and access to pornographic evidence should be restricted to persons whose professional duties require it.

Privacy protection is especially important because judicial proceedings can themselves amplify the harm if sensitive material is reproduced unnecessarily. Public-trial principles serve legitimate goals of transparency, but they are not absolute where protection of children and sexual privacy requires restrictions. The legal system should therefore permit closed hearings, anonymization of decisions, confidential records, and restrictions on publication where necessary. Sabri's treatment of criminal procedure recognizes that procedural principles must be balanced against legally protected interests in particular cases (20). Child pornography cases present a compelling basis for such balancing because disclosure of the victim's identity may facilitate rediscovery of the material or expose the child to stigma.

Victim protection also requires medical, psychological, and social assistance. The effects of online sexual exploitation may include anxiety, depression, shame, fear, distrust, social withdrawal, trauma-related symptoms, and persistent concern that images remain in circulation. Al-Issawi's psychological approach to criminal harm underscores the importance of understanding the psychological consequences of victimization rather than reducing injury to physical effects alone (24). Gholami's treatment of rights within protective systems similarly supports the principle that access to appropriate care is a component of meaningful legal protection (13). Psychological support should therefore begin as early as possible and continue independently of the duration of criminal proceedings.

Services should be specialized for child sexual trauma and should not depend on successful prosecution, because failure to identify or convict the offender does not eliminate the child's need for assistance.

Compensation is another essential component. The damage caused by online pornography may be material, psychological, reputational, and moral. Traditional civil-law concepts of damage can accommodate several of these forms, but practical difficulties arise in quantifying non-material harm and proving future consequences. Al-Bakri and Al-Bashir explain civil compensation through the general obligation to repair legally recognized harm caused to another person (25). Al-Nun similarly treats compensation as a mechanism for restoring the injured party, insofar as possible, to the position that would have existed without the wrongful conduct (26). Online child exploitation makes complete restoration impossible because digital material may never be fully eliminated. Financial compensation therefore has a symbolic and supportive function alongside payment for treatment, rehabilitation, loss, or other measurable consequences.

Moral and psychological damage require explicit recognition. Malekizadeh's discussion of victim compensation reflects the importance of including non-material injury within legal remedies (12). Iranian legal development has gradually expanded recognition of moral damage, although doctrinal and procedural uncertainties have historically existed regarding the scope and method of compensation. Javanmard's analysis of criminal protections for children identifies gaps between formal recognition of child rights and the practical mechanisms necessary to make those protections effective (15). Iraq faces similar challenges in ensuring that compensation mechanisms are accessible and sufficiently adapted to child victims. A comprehensive approach should recognize material expenses, treatment costs, psychological injury, damage to dignity and privacy, and the continuing consequences of digital circulation.

The removal and suppression of pornographic material should itself be treated as a protective remedy. Criminal prosecution of the offender does not necessarily prevent continued distribution. Competent authorities should be empowered to issue rapid orders for removal, blocking, preservation, or disabling access where lawful and technically feasible. Platforms should have clearly defined duties to respond to verified child sexual abuse material, preserve necessary evidence, and prevent deliberate re-uploading where appropriate. At the same time, such mechanisms require safeguards against arbitrary censorship. The defining basis for intervention should be the exploitation of children, not vague disagreement with lawful content. Isa, Sulayman, and Smail's analysis of liability arising from degrading content illustrates broader concerns about harmful digital material and the legal consequences of dissemination (27). Child pornography, however, should be distinguished from the more subjective category of degrading content because the sexual exploitation of children constitutes a direct violation of identifiable victims' rights.

Preventive policy must also address the circulation of previously produced material. Each new possessor or distributor may perpetuate demand and renew the victim's injury even if that person had no connection with the original abuse. For this reason, criminalization of knowing possession can serve a preventive function by reducing markets and communities that sustain production. Yet enforcement policy should differentiate between intentional possession and cases in which victims themselves retain or transmit material under coercion or as part of reporting. Children who have been induced to create or send images of themselves should not automatically be treated as offenders under laws designed to protect them. A victim-centered approach requires careful evaluation of age, coercion, manipulation, and purpose.

There are also significant challenges concerning institutional specialization. Online child exploitation combines criminal law, cybercrime investigation, victimology, psychology, family protection, digital forensics, and international

cooperation. General police or prosecutorial units may lack sufficient expertise. Specialized units can develop consistent investigative methods and improve coordination with child-protection services. Al-Masaeed's analysis of modern juvenile justice highlights the broader importance of specialized institutions and procedures when dealing with children within legal systems (28). Although child pornography victims are not juvenile offenders, the principle of specialization is equally relevant because ordinary procedures may fail to accommodate children's developmental needs.

The comparative weaknesses of Iraqi law are primarily legislative fragmentation, insufficient specificity concerning cyber-enabled forms of pornography, and reliance on provisions originally designed for morality, prostitution, or conventional indecent publications. This does not mean that Iraqi law lacks protective capacity; its juvenile welfare legislation provides valuable mechanisms concerning family responsibility, social services, psychological assessment, and protective intervention. Al-Saadi demonstrates that the Juvenile Welfare Law contains a significant institutional framework for dealing with children at risk and with failures of parental care (22). However, those mechanisms need to be integrated with a specialized cybercrime and victim-protection regime. A child whose image is being circulated online requires a response fundamentally different from a juvenile merely considered at risk of delinquency.

Iranian law provides more specific substantive criminalization, particularly concerning the use of children in obscene or indecent works and communication in cyberspace for sexual purposes. Nevertheless, specialization in criminalization must be matched by effective enforcement, procedural protection, removal mechanisms, compensation, and rehabilitation. Darvishi's examination of juvenile responses in Iranian law illustrates the broader development toward differentiated treatment of children within the justice system (29), while Javan Jafari Bojnourdi and Ghatloui Toroghi show that professional support for child victims remains essential regardless of the sophistication of substantive legislation (8). A law that defines the offence precisely but fails to prevent secondary victimization or to remove the material from circulation remains incomplete.

The two legal systems should therefore move toward an integrated model of protection. Such a model would define child pornography clearly, criminalize all intentional stages of production and circulation, address online grooming and facilitation, prescribe aggravated penalties for abuse of trust and organized activity, establish specialized investigative procedures, protect children's identities, provide access to legal representation and social support, recognize material and non-material damage, and create rapid mechanisms for removal and data preservation. Al-Zarqa's broader treatment of legal responsibility emphasizes the centrality of guaranteeing and repairing harm within legal relationships (30). In the specific context of online child exploitation, the same foundational idea requires a system in which punishment, prevention, reparation, and rehabilitation operate together rather than as isolated measures.

Conclusion

The comparative analysis demonstrates that child exploitation in online pornography constitutes a complex form of criminal conduct that cannot be adequately addressed through traditional concepts of obscenity or public morality alone. The defining feature of the offence is the sexual exploitation of a child and the transformation of that exploitation into material capable of being recorded, stored, reproduced, transmitted, sold, exchanged, or repeatedly circulated through digital networks. The Internet has intensified the gravity of the offence because it separates the continued existence of the harm from the original act of abuse. Once a pornographic image or

recording involving a child enters the digital environment, the material may continue to circulate long after the initial offender has lost control over it, making the child's victimization potentially continuous and geographically unlimited.

The analysis also shows that the criminal response must distinguish among the multiple stages of the offence. Production, coercive or manipulative recruitment of the child, photographing or recording, possession, deliberate downloading, storage, reproduction, publication, distribution, transfer, sale, exchange, uploading, recirculation, and sexually motivated online communication are not identical acts, although they may form part of the same exploitative process. Effective legislation must therefore define these forms of conduct with sufficient precision to satisfy the principle of legality while remaining technologically adaptable. Overly narrow provisions quickly become obsolete as platforms and communication technologies change, whereas excessively broad provisions risk uncertainty and disproportionate criminalization. The appropriate legislative approach is one that defines prohibited conduct functionally and ties criminal liability to knowledge, intention, exploitation, and the protected status of the child.

The comparison reveals a significant difference between Iraqi and Iranian legislation. Iraqi law recognizes the seriousness of conduct involving the sexual exploitation of minors and contains provisions capable of addressing pornography, indecent material, incitement to prostitution, and related offences. Nevertheless, its principal criminal provisions were developed before the emergence of contemporary digital communication and continue to rely heavily on general concepts of morality and traditional sexual offences. As a result, some technologically specific forms of conduct may require extensive interpretation or may not be covered with adequate clarity. The absence of a comprehensive child-specific offence addressing all stages of online pornographic exploitation represents the central legislative weakness of the Iraqi framework.

Iranian law has moved further toward specialized criminalization. Its child and adolescent protection framework more clearly identifies the use of children in obscene or indecent audiovisual material and extends liability to several forms of production, distribution, reproduction, display, sale, possession, storage, and electronic circulation. The specific criminalization of communication with children in cyberspace for sexual purposes also enables intervention before exploitation develops into completed production or physical abuse. This provides Iranian law with a comparatively broader and more technologically responsive structure. Nevertheless, legislative specificity alone is insufficient. Practical protection depends on enforcement capacity, digital investigation, coordination among institutions, preservation of electronic evidence, rapid removal of prohibited material, victim assistance, and effective procedural safeguards.

The study further demonstrates that the victim must remain at the center of criminal policy. Child pornography is not primarily an offence against abstract morality. It is an offence against a particular child's dignity, privacy, bodily and psychological integrity, sexual autonomy, and developmental security. This distinction has important practical consequences. It requires confidential proceedings, protection of identity, specialized interviewing, limits on unnecessary reproduction of sensitive evidence, access to legal and social assistance, psychological treatment, medical support where necessary, and measures designed to prevent secondary victimization during investigation and trial.

The continuing circulation of pornographic material creates an additional form of harm that should receive explicit legal recognition. The child's injury does not necessarily end when the original abusive act ends or when the first offender is convicted. Every subsequent redistribution may renew fear, humiliation, anxiety, and loss of control over personal identity. Criminal justice systems should therefore treat removal, suppression, and prevention of recirculation as essential protective measures rather than purely technical matters. Rapid communication with

online platforms, preservation of necessary evidence before removal, blocking of confirmed illegal material, and mechanisms to prevent repeated uploading should form part of a coordinated legal response.

Compensation should also be understood broadly. Material losses represent only one part of the damage caused by online sexual exploitation. Psychological injury, loss of privacy, reputational damage, emotional suffering, treatment expenses, and long-term social consequences may be considerably more significant. Both Iraqi and Iranian law would benefit from clearer mechanisms enabling child victims to obtain compensation for material, moral, and psychological harm without imposing excessive evidentiary burdens. Compensation should operate alongside, and not instead of, access to specialized therapeutic and social services.

The Iraqi legal system would benefit particularly from the adoption of explicit provisions criminalizing the intentional production, photographing, recording, acquisition, possession, downloading, storage, reproduction, publication, distribution, transfer, sale, exchange, uploading, and recirculation of pornographic material involving children. Such provisions should define the child clearly, distinguish child pornography from adult obscenity, establish the required mental element, and provide aggravated penalties where the offender abuses a position of trust, acts as part of an organized group, exploits multiple children, derives financial benefit, or distributes material on a large scale. Online grooming and other sexually motivated communications directed at obtaining pornographic material from children should also be addressed expressly.

Iranian legislation should continue to update its existing specialized framework so that new methods of digital exploitation remain covered without sacrificing legal certainty. Particular attention should be paid to procedural implementation, specialized cybercrime units, child-sensitive prosecution, rapid removal of illegal material, international cooperation, and effective compensation. The existence of relatively detailed substantive provisions should not obscure the continuing need to ensure that those provisions operate effectively in practice.

Both countries should strengthen institutional cooperation among police, prosecution authorities, courts, social services, schools, healthcare professionals, and digital service providers. Specialized training is necessary because child pornography cases combine technical and psychological difficulties that ordinary criminal investigations may not adequately address. Investigators require competence in digital forensics and evidence preservation, while professionals dealing directly with child victims require training in trauma-informed and age-appropriate communication. Coordination between these fields is essential because technical success in identifying an offender does not by itself guarantee adequate protection of the child.

The transnational character of online pornography also requires stronger cooperation between Iraq and Iran and with other States. Electronic evidence, offenders, victims, digital platforms, and servers may be located in different jurisdictions. Rapid preservation of evidence, lawful exchange of information, mutual legal assistance, and coordinated investigations are therefore indispensable. Bilateral and regional mechanisms should facilitate cooperation while maintaining judicial oversight and respect for procedural rights.

Ultimately, an effective legal response must integrate criminalization, prevention, investigation, victim protection, compensation, rehabilitation, and international cooperation. The objective should not be merely to impose punishment after harmful material has already spread. It should be to prevent exploitation where possible, intervene rapidly when risk appears, stop continuing dissemination, prosecute those responsible, and assist the child in recovering from the consequences of abuse. The comparative experience of Iraq and Iran demonstrates that specialized legislative provisions offer greater clarity and protective capacity than reliance on general morality offences alone. The future development of both systems should therefore be directed toward a coherent child-

centered framework capable of responding to the continuously changing technological environment while preserving legality, proportionality, procedural fairness, and the dignity of the child.

Acknowledgments

We would like to express our appreciation and gratitude to all those who helped us carrying out this study.

Authors' Contributions

All authors equally contributed to this study.

Declaration of Interest

The authors of this article declared no conflict of interest.

Ethical Considerations

All ethical principles were adhered in conducting and writing this article.

Transparency of Data

In accordance with the principles of transparency and open research, we declare that all data and materials used in this study are available upon request.

Funding

This research was carried out independently with personal funding and without the financial support of any governmental or private institution or organization.

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