

REPORT

"IT'S A SECRET"

Child Sexual  
Exploitation  
in Schools



*July 2024*



Oficina de Defensoría de los  
Derechos de la Infancia a.c.



## Three years ago, it was a scandal...

**18 schools were documented where preschool boys and girls reported organized violence. Sexual violence took place in 7 states of the Republic. Two cases were found where the public school was caught using positions from management to maintenance personnel for the commission of crimes.**

***In this context, organized sexual violence is the one committed by multiple adults jointly against children.***

There was no explanation of how criminals had gained access to positions within public and private schools. More than 50 media covered the news, while 3 international media wrote about these cases and the president of the Republic himself was publicly questioned on the subject on 2 occasions.

Months later, in one of the cases, it was announced that a judge had condemned the Mexican State as jointly liable for reparation of the damage. The sentence was harsh: A teacher was sentenced to 494 years in prison, while the Public Mexican School had to incorporate education on sexual violence into its classrooms, Mexico City had to guarantee transparent schools, without hidden spaces, and the Attorney General's Office had to expand its investigation.

**Was it a successful case?**

**Did the complaint and litigation  
at least prevent these crimes from continuing?**

**NO**

**Three years after the report "It's a Secret" was published:**

- The documented cases have increased to 27 in 12 states of the Republic.
- Not a single policy has changed in the SEP. There is no greater transparency in schools and no progress on investigating possible connections between cases.
- It is also not clear how criminals infiltrate schools by impersonating teachers, school directors or maintenance personnel.

**Three years ago, it was a scandal,  
yet nothing has changed.**

**Let us tell you why:**

## **Child sexual exploitation in schools**

### **More and more documented cases**

The cases documented are apparently unrelated, but they draw attention to coincidences in the type of violence described by the children. In all cases, children between 3 and 5 years describe serious and unusual sexual assaults that take place in public and private preschools. They report that sexual assault is committed by several adults together. It is common for several children to be attacked in groups, even forcing them to hurt each other. In many cases, the boys and girls report the presence of cameras and the use of costumes, some describe ingesting something that makes them sleepy or the presence of other sleeping companions. To date, 27 cases have been documented in 12 states of the Republic.

**REPORT**

*It's a Secret: Child Sexual Exploitation in Schools.*

<https://dispensariodi.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/It%C2%B4s-a-Secret-Child-sexual-exploitation-in-schools.pdf>



Documentation is based on court files, recommendations of human rights commissions and media coverage. In some cases, criminal responsibility is established against individual aggressors. Others only document what parents and their sons and daughters report. Reports do not state what is happening, since that requires a complex and serious criminal investigation. But there are some things that can be said.

- It can be said that the similarities between what so many children report must be investigated.
- It is undeniable that when more than one aggressor acts jointly within the same school, it is necessary to investigate and explain their recruitment.
- It is found that the administrative conditions under which teachers are recruited do not guarantee transparency, career or information on the criteria for appointment.
- It is undisputed that whatever is happening, action must be taken to make school a safe space for children.

The case documentation presented leaves more questions than answers. It seeks to require that the necessary measures be taken to prevent the continuation of such crimes and that each case and any possible connection between them be thoroughly investigated.

## The type of violence described by children exists.

The production and circulation of child sexual exploitation material (criminally called child pornography<sup>1</sup>) is a growing phenomenon. Current technologies have transformed the way in which this crime takes place. Ease in production of exploitation material, as well as accessibility to the media for its reproduction, have skyrocketed the number of victims and perpetrators. Just in 2022, NCMC<sup>2</sup> received 32 million reports from pages with child exploitation material. This is only on the open web<sup>3</sup>.

It has been documented that 63% of the perpetrators consume material involving children and adolescents between 4 and 13 years old, and 24% sees material involving victims from 0-3 years old, brutal or sadistic material and other violent material<sup>4</sup>.

Since 2016, the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights has documented cases of exploitation transmitted in real time by electronic means<sup>5</sup>. The so-called “livestreaming”, is sexual violence committed to one or more victims and broadcast live under the direction of a viewer who may even be in another country. In 60% of cases, the perpetrator is an adult close to the victim.

***Violence described by victims is corroborated with patterns documented by international police.***

The type of abuse described by children is extreme and unusual but corroborated with the type of violence documented by international bodies that analyze child exploitation material to remove it from circulation and identify victims.

Although it is known that this type of violence exists, it is common for children not to be believed when they report what they have experienced. Even authorities specialized in child exploitation are reluctant to believe the victims. While the denial of pain is a normal human reaction, its consequence is the perpetuation of violence.

<sup>1</sup>The term “child pornography” is not recommended as it obscures the nature of the material. Pornography is a lawful material with various types of artistic, cultural or commercial expression. When children and adolescents are involved, the material is not pornographic but one that records an act of sexual violence. The recommended term is therefore child sexual exploitation material.

<sup>2</sup>NCMC is an organization authorized by the US government to receive reports of possible online child exploitation. CyberTipline 2022 Report (National Center for Missing and Exploited Children, 2023) Accessed from: <https://www.missingkids.org/cybertiplinedata> 08/16/2023

<sup>3</sup>It is estimated that 80% of the child exploitation material circulates on the dark web which is accessed anonymously through TOR browsing programs. Insoll T, Ovaska A & Vaaranen-Valkonen N, CSAM Users in the Dark Web: Protecting Children Through Prevention (Suojellaan Lapsiäry. ReDirection Survey Report 2021). En: <file:///Users/mac/Downloads/ReDirection%20Survey%20Report.pdf>

<sup>4</sup>Anonymous survey of 8,484 consumers of child exploitation material on the dark web. Idem.

<sup>5</sup>United nations human rights office of the high commissioner – special rapporteur on the sale and sexual exploitation of children. New digital technologies produce unprecedented levels of child abuse material online March 18, 2016

<https://www.ohchr.org/en/stories/2016/03/new-digital-technologies-produce-unprecedented-levels-child-abuse-material-online>

## Incredulity and suspicion

In Mexico, as in other countries, these cases generate strong reactions in public opinion. It is understandable. These are horrible cases. These are very young children and the idea that they may be victims of brutal violence is frightening. To consider that there are people who like this violence, that its production generates enormous profits and that many others tolerate it for the sake of economic profit generates disgust and repulsion. In many cases it is easier to think of this extreme violence as a conspiracy, a mistake or something that happens in distant places.

The problem is that recognition of crime is necessary for its prevention and combating. There is no way to do justice and prevent more victims if the existence of this violence is denied. It is worth considering some objective elements that appeal to reason, and from reason to strengthen the temple in order to demand effective actions.

Some common reactions, which have been expressed in Mexico because of the reporting of possible cases of sexual exploitation of children in schools are:

***Denying the existence of the criminal phenomenon allows its continuity.***

### ***It's about fantasies created by the children.***

Children, especially in the early years of life, do not fantasize about sexual violence. Child thinking has enormous difficulties in describing the unknown and what has not been lived. A child CAN repeat a false statement or hold false beliefs but will NOT be able to describe a false experience. The narratives of victims in documented cases describe events that they themselves do not understand. They are described, as is expected for their age, from a subjective and concrete point of view.



### ***They are said to be induced by adults.***

Even when a child is instructed to repeat a saying, he or she will NOT be able to develop a subjective and spontaneous description of an event that he or she has not experienced. The characteristics of childhood thinking make this cognitive exercise impossible in early childhood. In addition, these are apparently unrelated cases. These are victims who, in isolation, in various states of the Republic, describe violence that is not part of the common place. Their accounts coincide with cases documented by international police but that, in the case of extreme violence, are not generally known patterns. The cases coincide in details that may be product of information exchanged on social networks and chats of perpetrators.

### ***This is just a conspiracy for the purpose of extorting schools.***

As with any child testimonial, children do not have the cognitive ability to describe learned experiences and will only be able to narrate with subjective details what they have experienced. In the documented cases there are no testimonies or reports of attempted extortion and victims consistently demand investigation and criminal responsibility rather than financial gain. Documented cases involve more than 5 victims each. An extortion scheme would involve the coordination of multiple families at the cost of severe trauma to their sons and daughters. It would also mean that many families in various locations choose to fabricate complex stories of organized violence rather than more common attacks as a means of extortion.

### ***The organized aspects of this violence are ignored and treated as individual cases of sexual abuse.***

One of the most worrying elements of documented cases is that some public and private institutions are being controlled. The coordinated action of, in some cases, up to seven adults jointly delinquent in the same public school, necessarily involves some irregularity in the recruitment process. The serious institutional vulnerability that the cases reveal, generates reactions of denial or minimization by authorities instead of reviewing the procedures for recruitment and supervision of school staff.

## How can something like this happen in a public school?

It would seem impossible. In one of the cases, 7 school staff members are criminally convicted. The director, teachers and staff are found guilty of sexual abuse of more than 30 children. The violence takes place in several bathrooms, the office of the management and in the private house of the maintenance personnel located within the school facilities. More than one adult participates at a time. All this happens in a public preschool.

It would seem impossible, and yet the conditions of the Mexican school make the educational establishment vulnerable to crime. It is only possible to understand this criminal phenomenon if one considers how the public school works in Mexico.

The lack of regulation and transparency has created a context that makes the public education system vulnerable to recruitment by criminal groups. In a context of systematic and widespread irregularity, the co-optation of posts for the commission of crimes is made possible.

***In a context of systematic and widespread irregularity, the co-optation of posts for the commission of crimes is made possible.***

### **Some areas of particular concern are:**

- There is no clear and transparent procedure for the recruitment of teachers. In the cases that have been litigated, it has been impossible to determine how, when, under what standards and by whose authorization the accused teachers were hired. The employment records are uneven, incomplete and fragmented. There is no clear regulation on how school staff are recruited. The allocation of places within schools is a black box. The opacity and discretion of the designation of jobs makes it a possible currency. In many cases, the designations are made for economic, political or personal interests. But the context of corruption in teaching and administrative recruitment leaves the school vulnerable to infiltration by criminals who use their position for committing crimes.

- There are no independent channels for complaints. When students or parents wish to report abuse within the school, they should do so to their own school or SEP. Worse, the SEP states in its protocols that any complaint of sexual abuse by a school official will be investigated by the SEP itself. Although every public officer is obliged to report to the prosecution any possible crime committed against a boy or girl SEP does not. It is illegal to establish that the institution itself will investigate if there is a crime, and then decide whether to give notice to the person who should investigate if there is a crime. According to official figures, only 52% of the complaints for sexual violence received by SEP are known to the prosecution<sup>6</sup>.
- There is no transparency in school spaces. Several of the schools where cases of possible organized violence were reported had either classrooms or the whole school covered with black cloth or cardboard. Within many public schools there are private houses where the maintenance personnel lives. Many of the reports describe that the assault takes place within private homes accessed from inside the school campus.
- There is no independent or transparent supervision. School supervision, as well as the recruitment of staff, is a black box. There is not approved monitoring records or independent mechanisms to account for performance within a school establishment.
- There is a context in which sexual violence within the school and impunity of cases prevail. According to data reported by SEP itself, at least one sexual abuse is reported within a school on a daily basis. The authorities themselves consider that there is an underreporting of complaints. The Mexican school exists in a context where reports of sexual abuse against students are common and therefore organized violence is more easily unnoticed. In fact, all documented cases where criminal investigations exist are treated as sexual abuse. No investigation is carried out into the recruitment of pederasts within the school.

<sup>6</sup>Crail, A y Guazo, D. Depredadores en las Aulas. El Universal, 2023.  
in: <https://interactivos.eluniversal.com.mx/2023/abuso-sexual-escuelas/secreto-escolar>

## **The Mexican State's response to the complaints**

### **The neglectful State**

The publication of the report "It's a Secret: Child Sexual Exploitation in Schools" was a scandal. More than 40 national and local media covered the case, the international press wrote about these cases and on two occasions the president of the Republic was publicly questioned on the subject.

Given the public concern and certainty that the holder of executive power had knowledge of the reported cases, it could be thought that action would be taken to investigate the facts and prevent future abuses in schools. However, the answer was different: ignore and let it pass.

When questioned, the executive ignored specific allegations of schools being seized by crime where multiple attackers were acting together. He simply replied by referring to violence against children in a general way. His reply condemned the violence and mentioned that the Department for Security and Citizen's Protection (SSPC) was very attentive to the issue. He also assured that the head of the institution would provide more information on child protection measures<sup>7</sup>. The SSPC report never happened and complaints of organized violence were ignored.

<sup>7</sup>Presidential press conference "La Mañanera" May 31, 2021. In: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hNmsDJGjY08>.

***The SSPC report never happened and complaints of organized violence were ignored.***

A journalist was insistent and inquired about whether procedures would be changed in the Department of Public Education (SEP) to force reporting of possible crimes. The executive was vague in its response: he assured that it would be revised “expeditiously”. Although the question was about SEP’s actions, the President once again watered down the issue and referred to violence in schools, on public roads and “everywhere<sup>8</sup>”. Evading the question, he moved the subject further away from schools by emphasizing the problem of “...abuse in families, because it is also regrettable that this happens within the family by decomposition into families by the disintegration of families...”

The strategy was politically successful. Although for 7 days there was a lot of media coverage on the subject, public attention eventually turned to other things. In the vortex of constant news, no issue remains until it is resolved.

## **Negligence in preventing**

At the time of publication, there was one encouraging element. Clarifying what has happened is difficult, but preventing this kind of violence from happening again is not rocket science. The state can implement relatively simple measures to ensure that schools are not hazardous spaces for children. At the time of publication, it was expected that at least public reporting would prevent a recurrence of violence.

Making matters even easier, at the end of the same year in which the report is published a court order to SEP to take concrete action. A criminal judge in a sentence confirmed by a court of appeal clearly indicates to the SEP what actions to take to prevent this type of crime from happening again. The court order still lacks transparency in the recruitment of school staff. However, it is a good start to make schools a safe place.

<sup>8</sup>Presidential press conference “La Mañana” May 31, 2021. In: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hNmsDIGjY08>

Some of the actions that the court order imposes on SEP are:

1. Publish on the official website of SEP educational and audio-visual materials related to the experiences that the victims lived in the search for justice. Also publish educational materials, such as infographics, on the prevention of sexual abuse crimes.
2. The SEP shall institute public policies regarding the creation of safe school spaces for all kindergartens in Mexico City, where it shall take into consideration that, among other things, there are spaces that allow the interior and exterior visibility of classrooms, administrative areas, bathrooms and games, as well as staff responsible for the surveillance of students.
3. Establish public policies related to the awareness of health specialists who have contact with victims of sexual crimes.
4. It should also continuously implement training courses for all academic and administrative staff of the institution, regarding the prevention, detection and treatment of situations of sexual violence against children in the educational field.
5. The institution of a day in the school calendar to raise awareness of the seriousness of child sexual abuse and maltreatment in classrooms.
6. Make a public act of recognition of its irregular activity in relation to the facts of the case and actions committed by the sentenced person.

<https://dispensariodi.com/sentencia-penal-explotacion-sexual-en-es-cuelas-preescolar-pederastia-abuso-sexual-y-violacion/>

Despite receiving a court order to carry out these 6 tasks, SEP has not complied.

***It was expected that SEP would voluntarily take preventive measures. Despite a court order to do so, no action has been taken to prevent the recurrence of these crimes.***

Since it was notified in August 2023, it has presented partial advances, simulations and copious amounts of paper. Substantive changes that would effectively prevent these crimes from happening have not taken place.

It was reasonably expected that with the publication of the report and the publicity it had, SEP would be the first to voluntarily take action to prevent these crimes. Without doubting its genuine interest in the well-being of students, it was expected to react by reviewing safety at schools.

However, the reaction of the institution has been inexplicable. Not only has there been absolute silence in the public, but the circumstances that make these cases possible have not changed.



## **The criminal investigation that never happened**

For years the prosecution refused to investigate whether these strange cases could be linked or to investigate if there were acts of corruption from school authorities. Although it was stressed that the recruitment of multiple pederasts acting together (up to 7 in some cases) could not be a coincidence and that only through coordinated action can these designations be explained, the prosecution only investigated individual sexual abuse. No research was done on how teachers came to schools, why they agreed and acted together and whether sexual exploitation material had been produced.

One of the achievements after the publication of the report was that the Office of the Attorney-General (FGR) finally agreed to open an investigation file on all reported cases. This required not only the publication of the report but also the intervention of a foreign embassy staff. Sexual exploitation of children is often a transnational crime. Many governments are making efforts to cooperate in combating this criminal phenomenon criminal in different countries, such as Mexico, where exploitation materials are produced. Thanks to public attention and diplomatic management, the investigation file of the set of cases was opened. The file was located in the most specialized area in sexual exploitation crimes and trafficking of children and adolescents within the FGR.

The investigation file was opened in July 2021. After three years of research by the country's most specialized body, no progress has been made. This is a mock investigation. As complainants, they have been progressively more proactive. Initially, the specialized unit was expected to indicate how to conduct the investigation. In the face of the authorities' passivity, the Oficina de Defensoría de los Derechos de la Infancia (ODI) initiated petitions to have certain measures taken. After obtaining poor prosecution, written submissions were made to international bodies and intelligence units for the prosecution to request information. In the face of inaction in the investigation, the complainant took it upon herself to collect data and hand them over to the prosecution. Finally, the collaboration of an expert on the subject was facilitated to hold a meeting and advise the prosecution team and the intelligence unit of FGR on the case<sup>9</sup>.

Despite all efforts to prompt a diligent investigation, the three years have resulted in disjointed, incomplete, useless and deficient actions. There is not a single piece of information useful for understanding how, repeatedly in various states of the republic, people are hired to commit joint offences within the same school.

***During 3 years of investigation the Attorney General's Office (FGR):***

- Has not accomplished to obtain investigation files from other prosecutors' offices on similar cases. It only gets two files and finds it impossible to get the local prosecutors' offices to share information of interest. It also fails to obtain case files with similar patterns that the FGR itself investigates in other units. Only manages to obtain a copy of a file that is litigated by the ODI.
- Has not accomplished to obtain employment records of convicted persons who infiltrated the schools as teachers and maintenance personnel. Does not obtain employment records of persons accused of assault with similar patterns.
- Has not obtained information on whether there are any prior complaints against the accused.
- Has not interviewed any person or authority on how schools are supervised or how staff are recruited.
- Has not investigated whether the SEP has registered complaints with patterns of violence similar to those investigated.

<sup>9</sup>Visit of Robert Shilling, Mexico City, April 2023. R. Shilling is a former director of the Unit of Crimes against Children at INTERPOL. FED/SEIDO/UEITM-PO-CDMX/0000399/2021



- Has not interviewed those already sentenced for crimes that meet the standards investigated.
- Has not conducted covert action in schools where there are anonymous reports, but the school is still operating. Upon approval of surveillance in one of these schools, the private school suddenly changes its name. This monitoring did not produce useful data.
- Has not analyzed the geolocations of international child exploitation alerts is made to identify correlation with reports.
- Has not collected images of students in schools reported for their search on international child sexual exploitation databases. Only face images obtained by ODI from direct victims have been used.
- Has not obtained images of logos, uniforms, interior and exterior of schools to cross-reference with international databases on child sexual exploitation. When ODI collects and delivers these images, FGR reports that no matches were found.
- Has not included in the file the response obtained from international bodies that carried out the search for images.
- Has not investigated a single person's bank accounts.
- Did not requested call logs from any of the persons of interest, nor was it investigated whether the detained persons had contact with each other or with any person of interest on the day of their arrest.
- Has not attempted to identify schools currently employing persons reported by the children but not bound over to trial at that time, in order to conduct covert investigations into those schools.
- Did not requested copy of the content of cell phones of detained persons for the purpose of investigating whether there was any exploitative material, contacts between persons of interest or other useful communications.
- Did not executed any of the actions recommended by an international specialist with decades of experience in international investigation of crimes against children that ODI managed to bring to Mexico to participate in a meeting to discuss strategies for the case investigation.

## **What was done by the FGR in 3 years?**

**A** network analysis by cyber police was obtained at the request of the ODI. As the request was made by an office and without further information about the case (what was known and what was not known) the result of their efforts was to document from the internet the complaints that were already documented in the report published by the ODI years ago.

At the request of ODI, a network analysis of a group of persons of interest was obtained. The result produced by CENAPI collects general data on people from open networks. The analysis does not investigate or establish relationships between the actors, nor does it search and analyse the contents of its publications.

Records requests to the states of various research files and records their responses. The FGR did not receive the required folders.

Records the queries made by the complainant party to the research file.

Despite the lack of results obtained, the prosecution has accumulated a folder of more than four volumes and about a thousand pages. The voluminous files contain the information gathered without a thread, an investigation plan and an analysis of the contents. It is just about the idle accumulation of paper.

***The voluminous files contain the information gathered without a thread, an investigation plan and an analysis of the contents. It is just about the idle accumulation of paper.***

NO	Cases that meet the criminal patterns				
1	2016	Circulo infantil Personalizado S.C. y/o Colegio Circulo Educativo	CDMX	private school	First Report 7 states CDMX Jalisco Baja California San Luis Potosi Edo México Oaxaca Morelos
2	2014	Care	CDMX	private school	
3	2017	Fray Juan Ruíz de Cabañas y Crespo	Jalisco	public school	
4	2016	3 de Mayo de 1535	BC	public school	
5	2016	Montessori Matatena	CDMX	private school	
6	2001	Jardín de Niños Arq. Ramiro González del Sordo	CDMX	public school	
7	2017	Jardín de Niños "Marcelino de Champagnat"	CDMX	public school	
8	2007	Jardín de Niños "Andrés Oscoy"	CDMX	public school	
9	2011	Jardín de Niños Laura Elena Arce Cavazos	CDMX	public school	
10	2018	Jardín de niños Idolina Gaona de Ruiz	Jalisco	public school	
11	2012	Jardín de Niños Carlos González Peña	Jalisco	public school	
12	2011	Escuela Primaria Adolfo López Mateos	Jalisco	public school	
13	2014	Jardín de Niños "Estado de México"	EdoMex	public school	
14	2017	Luis Gonzaga Urbina	SLP	private school	
15	2007 a 2018	Tlatelli	Morelos	private school	
16	2006	Instituto San Felipe	Oaxaca	private school	
17	2008	Colegio Miguel de Cervantes	Oaxaca	private school	
18	2006	Colegio Oakwood	Morelos	private school	
19	2018	Colegio Anáhuac	Tabasco	private school	Secon Report Tabasco Veracruz Coahuila
20	2021	Colegio Americano de Xalapa	Veracruz	private school	
21	2019	Guadalupe Borja	Coahuila	private school	
22	2022	Preescolar "Lic. Don José Natividad Macías"	Guanajuato	public school	Third report
23	2023	Kinder "Miguel Dominguez"	Estado de México	public school	
24	2023	Colegio Carmel	CDMX	private school	
25	2023	Colegio Ana Pavlova	CDMX	private school	Fourth report Guanajuato Hidalgo
26	2023	Caso "A"	CDMX	private school	
27	2023	Caso "B"	Hidalgo	public school	

private school	14
public school	13



Oficina de Defensoría de los  
Derechos de la Infancia a.c.