

Throughout my undergraduate studies, I conducted an in-depth research project looking into "Cybercrimes Committed Against Children" with a focus on child sexual abuse material (CSAM), raising rates of vulnerable youth, and digital literacy education. Through this work, I was able to present at multiple academic conferences, student engagement forums, and the Virginia undergraduate research showcase to legislators. Through this work, I was able to shed light on a not-so-common topic while also educating peers and members of my community on how to prevent these attacks from happening and what to do if you or someone you know has become a victim.

Strengths of the project

One primary strength of my research was how much of an interdisciplinary approach I had to my original thought of what I wanted to research. I not only had a cybersecurity perspective, but also included criminal justice, psychology, and sociology. This gave me the edge to explore the technical aspects of these issues and the societal and psychological aspects associated with them. My research was able to look at both qualitative and quantitative data. These came in the form of interviews with professionals in the field, looking at massive databases, combing through numbers to find the data I needed, and looking into related internet trends.

Another strength was the partial application of my findings. I was not solely focused on the problems at hand, but also on solutions to the huge problem I found. Not only just one solution, but actionable solutions at that. This included raising awareness of the issue at hand, increasing digital literacy among community members, and promoting and advocating for policy change. I did this by translating the academic insights I found into a public discussion for all.

Limitations and Challenges

Although I had quite a few strengths with this project, I also had some notable setbacks. One of the most prominent was limited access to up-to-date or unrestricted datasets. When looking for statistical numbers, finding exactly what I wanted was hard. Most of the databases I wanted to access were restricted to active investigation and or content of material. This was due to the nature of trying to limit my age range to children under 18. Limited public data is available due to the minors and the topic's sensitive nature. This meant I could rely only on publicly available reports, which could be behind current active trends. Additionally, while my interviews with professionals in the field provided me with valuable insight, they were limited due to time and resource constraints.

Another limitation was the lack of direct connection with youth and their perspective. Regarding ethical concerns, I couldn't obtain personal testimonies of youth affected by these crimes. I could only look at large datasets and gather my information about their perspective from there. In the future, I would like to work more closely with youth organizations and educators to incorporate this viewpoint in my research.

Scholarly Literature

My research contributes to a growing space of the digital realm with a focus on the interconnections between child safety and digital environments. Exciting studies often focused on the psychological effects of exposure to inappropriate content or the technical ways that an attack occurred by a perpetrator. My work helps build a bridge between the two by strongly emphasizing the roles of education, community awareness, and digital literacy as the best weapon of defence against these attacks.

Academic Growth

Conducting this research helped me dig deeper than just the surface of an issue to understand why. As researchers, we have a lot of whys but not a lot of answers. It helped me understand my why better throughout this research journey. It has deepened my interest in cybersecurity and shown me the human factor related to technology. I have gained skills in public speaking, data analysis, and advocacy for an issue I am so passionate about.