

# How State and Non-State Actors Use and Respond to Technological Initiatives for Reporting and Management of Child Sexual Abuse in Selected Schools

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## Abstract

Child sexual abuse (CSA) is a problematic global issue, with Nigeria being no exception. Despite its widespread nature, CSA often remains inadequately reported due to sociocultural barriers and fear of stigmatisation. The integration of digital technology has emerged as a promising approach to reporting and managing child sexual abuse. This study investigates the potential of digital technology in managing CSA in public secondary schools in Ondo State, Nigeria, with a focus on the Ondo State Agency Against Gender-Based Violence (OSAA-GBV) Violence Against Persons Prohibition (VAPP) at School Campaign. Employing the in-depth interview to obtain data from school administrators in public secondary schools in Ondo State and key staff of the Ondo State Agency Against Gender-Based Violence (OSAA-GBV). The findings reveal that while a digital platform is available to facilitate reporting and management of CSA cases, its adoption is hindered by limited awareness, technology anxiety, infrastructural challenges, and reliance on manual (non-digital) reporting methods. The study suggest that technology can help organise critical data and improve response to CSA.

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## INTRODUCTION

Child sexual abuse (CSA) is a global issue, and digital technology has transformed both its perpetration and prevention, presenting new opportunities for addressing this pressing social problem. Child sexual abuse, a form of maltreatment affects millions of children worldwide. CSA constitutes a profound public health and societal concern of global proportions (Castro et al., 2019). This issue encompasses a range of behaviours including but not limited to physical abuse, non-physical abuse, exploitation, grooming and sexual harassment (Mueller-Coyne, 2024). CSA constitute a form of sexual gratification and unhuman treatment directed towards a child which compromises the physical and emotional safety of the minor (Harracksingh & Johnson, 2022).

UNICEF estimated that “one in eight girls and women, and one in eleven boys and men experienced rape or sexual assault during childhood” (Cagney et al., 2025). This is evidence that prevalence is alarmingly high across regions. CSA often occurs within familiar settings. According to the US Department of Justice, three out of four adolescents who have been sexually assaulted were

victimised by someone they knew well. The data goes further to reveal that nearly three in four (74%) reported that the assault was committed by someone they knew well. Almost one-third of sexual assault cases (32.5%) involved perpetrators who were friends, and more than one-fifth (23.2%) were strangers. Another one-fifth (21.1%) were committed by a member of the youth's family, including fathers or stepfathers, brothers or stepbrothers, sisters or stepsisters, grandparents, other adult relatives, and other child relatives.

The consequences of this act are profound and long lasting (Zinzow et al., 2012). Estimating the prevalence of child sexual abuse in Nigeria is challenging due to substantial regional disparities, with reported rates varying considerably between 5% and 38% (David et al., 2018). The alarming rate of CSA in Nigeria is further highlighted by The Violence Against Children Survey, which approximates that 60% of children experience emotional, physical, or sexual violence before age eighteen (Ohayi et al., 2022), 70% of sexually abused children suffer repeated abuse, while 90% of perpetrators are known to the child and their family (CeCe Yara Child Advocacy Centre, 2024).

Ondo State in Nigeria has exhibited a disproportionately high prevalence of child sexual abuse, with consistently elevated incidence rates reported over an extended period (Foundation for Partnership Initiatives in the Niger Delta, 2021). The state's cultural context, marked by a rampant culture of silence, inadequate justice system, socio-cultural norms that perpetuate violence, and a dearth of education and awareness about CSA, combine to create an environment in which CSA thrives (Buna, 2024). This is evidenced by over 90 documented cases across Ondo state between 2015 and 2020 (Foundation for Partnership Initiatives in the Niger Delta, 2020; National Bureau of Statistics, 2019) and an additional 30 cases between January 2018 and June 2021 (Foundation for Partnerships Initiatives in the Niger Delta, 2021).

Again, a report by African Union Development Agency-New Partnership for Africa's Development (2023), revealed that one of the most common types of gender-based violence is school-related gender-based violence-SRGBV. It often takes the form of physical assault, psychological threats or direct sexual exploitation, internet-enabled sexual abuse/exploitations, sexual harassments, non-consensual sexual abuse/advances that takes place in and around schools or learning environment (Chitsamatanga & Rembe, 2020; Rimer, 2024; UNICEF, 2023; UNICEF, nd). Research reveals that between 46-78% of adolescent girls in African schools have experience one form of SR-GBV or the other (Mutinta, 2022). These numbers likely represent a fraction of the true scope of the problem, as underreporting is also a significant concern. (Buna, 2024; Adenitan, 2023; Ojewola & Akinduyo, 2016).

Initiatives to address child sexual abuse have focused on awareness, reporting, and victim support (Folayan, 2022; Invictus Africa, 2023). The widespread adoption of technology, including the internet and mobile devices, has increased opportunities to address sexual violence globally (Salerno-Ferraro, et al., 2022; Choi, et al., 2018). Technology plays a dual role in child sexual abuse, both facilitating and preventing it, especially given the internet's involvement in spreading abusive content (Steel et al., 2020). Child sexual abuse has gained significant attention in recent years due to the rising number of cases and the role of technology in facilitating victimisation and perpetration, however the strategic integration of digital technologies offers a promising avenue for improving the detection and reporting of child sexual abuse cases.

UNICEF (2020); Philbrick et al. (2021) highlight the potential of digital platforms to support child sexual abuse prevention by offering innovative solutions. For example, a digital tool developed with children aged 6-12 enhanced their participation in welfare assessments, finding that collaborative design improved the application, facilitated communication, and promoted child participation (Blomberg et al., 2022). Luo and Botash (2020) found a mobile app for child sexual abuse treatment to be highly usable and acceptable, although suggestions for improvement included adding features

and providing training. Another study found that existing mobile apps for identifying and reporting child sexual abuse cases vary in usability and lack comprehensive features. It highlights the need for more robust and user-friendly applications (Jamuna et al., 2023). The absent of technology in schools has been said to limit the reporting options of CSA and to access victims and survivors. The study also discovered that the use of technology allows victims to disclose CSA cases with a measure of identity protection (Lobson, 2023).

The UNODC (2015) however argues that while new technologies have advanced reporting, many areas lack the infrastructure and coordination to fully leverage digital tools. Notwithstanding the considerable research attention this topic has received in other parts of the world, a significant knowledge gap exists in our region, warranting further investigation. This study leverages the Ondo State Agency Against Gender-Based Violence's (OSAA-GBV) Violence Against Persons' Prohibition (VAPP) at School Campaign to investigate the potential of digital technology in child sexual abuse case management. A thorough examination of the campaign's efficacy in harnessing digital technology to prevent and respond to CSA is essential to inform future interventions. The adoption of technology is to encourage transparent reporting line, permit victims to document and report case directly to agencies and school administrator, provide fully anonymised infrastructure for victim protection, deal with loads of enquiries and data for easy retrieval and to provide real-time situation reports on CSA (McCain et al. 2025).

The work of Jain (2025) established that deploying technological tools such as Ai, internet facilities, big data and other useful tools, stakeholder can promptly expedite actions and assist victims of CSA. In the report of Grzegorzczuk (2023) to the United Nations for safer children initiative using Ai to detect CSA activities, the researcher claim that digital tools are capable of flagging CSA materials, report suspicious activities, identify perpetrators promptly and can be used to assist victims.

This research investigated the role of digital technology in child sexual abuse management, focusing on the OSAA-GBV VAPP at School Campaign in Ondo State. The study examined the contribution of technology use to OSAA-GBV's campaign against child sexual abuse, efficacy of technology deployment in the campaign, stakeholders' utilisation of technology in reporting child sexual abuse identified challenges encountered by OSAA-GBV in reporting child sexual abuse cases using digital technology.

## **METHODS**

### ***Study setting and design***

This study was informed by the need to assess the extent stakeholders and agencies responsible for the management of child sexual molestation are using technology to bridge the obvious gaps in effectively addressing cases of child abuse. Previously, the events relating to child abuse have been marred by several irregularities, such as fear of stigmatization, corruption, uncooperative parents and guardians, inefficient enforcement and tracking of cases, fear of attacks and systemic biases against the victims. To address such anomalies, the Ondo State Agency Against Gender-Based Violence- OSAA-GBV school campaign tries to promote safe learning environment for students discourage gender-based violence in schools and enable equal rights among secondary school children. Specifically, this agency selected few schools for their pilot programmes in Ondo State, trained and encouraged them to used their dedicated technology in reporting and managing child sexual abuse in the schools. So, in the cause of this study, the researchers tried to understand how the stakeholders have used technology in addressing CSA in the state.

The study undertook a qualitative approach, with in-depth interview as the primary method for this work. The choice of this approach is to enable deeper understanding of participants' perspectives and experiences on the issues of CSA and deploying technologies to address child sexual abuse issues

(Ponto, 2015). Interview was deemed fit for this study in order to get the stakeholders views on the extent they have deployed and used technology in reporting, response, and management of CSA in the study locations. This, in the views of Yin (2003), it helps the researcher establish the true reflection of the phenomenon from the views of those who really know. Gaining insights into the 'why' and 'how' parts of the investigations without manipulating the behaviour of the study participants. It also permits the participants to explain and describe the phenomenon in details as it naturally occurs on a day-to-day basis. (Yin, 2003). This design was relevant in this study because it is widely applied in the social science discipline and it helped in capturing in-depth data from the participants (Kaako, et al., 2025).

### ***Study participants***

This study specifically targeted 6 school administrators (making up 1 Principal and 1 Counsellor for each school) from 3 different secondary schools and 3 officials from Ondo State Agency Against Gender-Based Violence (OSAA-GBV), in Akure-South local government area of Ondo State, Nigeria. This study used purposive sampling to recruit the 9 participants for in-depth interviews, aiming for data saturation. With this selection technique, this study aligns with the thought of Sebiru (2025) that it allows the researchers to glean useful insights from persons or group of persons who are deemed to possess specific attributes, experiences, knowledge or expertise that are relevant to the study, provide in-depth understanding, or enrich the data that will contribute to the research's objectives.

### ***Instrumentation and analysis***

The researchers utilised face-to-face in-depth interviews. These were useful in generating rich data, establishing rapport between the researchers and participants and creating an environment where the participants freely responded with their opinions (Fontana & Frey, 2000; Kaako, et al., 2025). A semi-structured interview guide with open-ended questions was utilised to facilitate in-depth discussions, allowing for comprehensive data collection through saturation. The instrument was designed in simple English and administered with the assistance of a field research assistant for note-taking and audio recording. The interview sessions lasted for about 20 minutes for each category of participants, and the data collection and transcription spanned between February 2025 to April 2025.

Audio recordings of the interviews were manually transcribed to ensure accuracy, and thematic content analysis was conducted using NVivo software to identify key themes and patterns in participants' responses. Data visualisation techniques, including word clouds and tables, were employed to present the findings in a descriptive and narrative format. The analysis followed a transparent multi-stage approach from transcribing the interview into text, to the systematic use of open-coding utilising NVivo's node feature, then the codes were automatically generated and refined. The inductive-deductive approach was used ascertain the relevance of the themes to the overall objectives, while ensuring that other emerging themes are queried and tested for relevance.

### ***Ethical consideration***

This study adhered to rigorous ethical standards, obtaining approval from the University of Medical Sciences (UNIMED) Ondo Research Ethics Committee (approval number: UNIMED-HREC/Apv/2025/066), and strictly adhered to the principles outlined in the 2013 Helsinki Declaration (World Medical Association, 2025), with measures that included informed consent, confidentiality, secure data storage, and participant protection, ensuring a low risk level and upholding the highest ethical standards in research. The study's inclusion criteria comprised school administrators and OSAA-GBV staff who had participated in the OSAA-GBV VAPP at School Campaign in Ondo State, were willing to participate in the study, and were older people. The exclusion criteria included individuals

who had not participated in the campaign, those who declined to participate in the study. All the study participants provided verbal and written consent to participate in the study.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The interview sample comprised nine participants, consisting of one male and eight females, with diverse roles: three management staff from the Ondo State Agency Against Gender-Based Violence, three school counsellors, and three school administrators from public secondary schools in Ondo State, as detailed in Table 1.

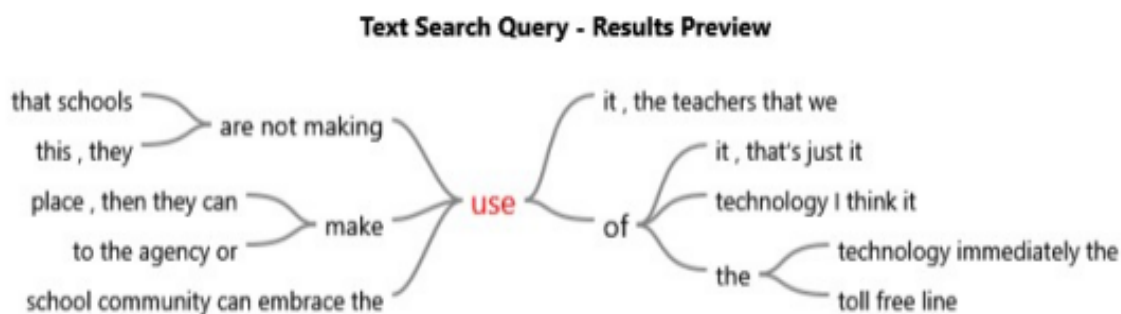
**Table 1.** Demographic distribution of Respondents

Organisation	Position	Number of Participants
OSAA-GBV	Executive Secretary	1
OSAA-GBV	Director of Legal Services	1
OSAA-GBV	Director of Finance and Administration	1
St Louis Girls' Grammar School	School Counsellor	1
St Louis Girls' Grammar School	School Administrator	1
CAC Grammar School	School Counsellor	1
CAC Grammar School	School Administrator	1
Fiwasaye Girls' Grammar School	School Counsellor	1
Fiwasaye Girls' Grammar School	School Administrator	1
<b>Total</b>		<b>9</b>



**Figure 1.** Thematic Word Cloud Analysis

Source: The authors



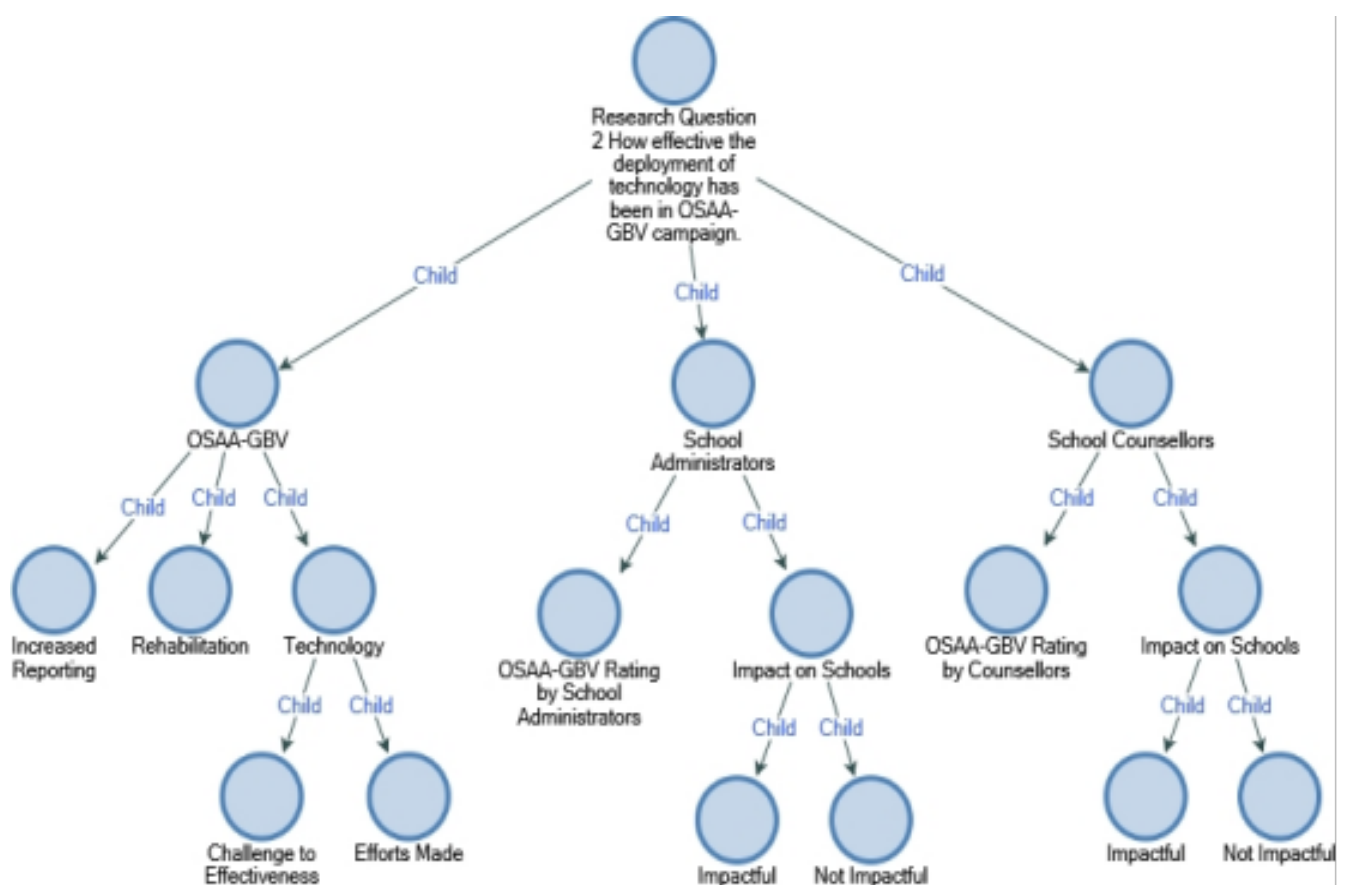
**Figure 2.** Text Analysis of Key Expressions

Source: The authors

Thematic analysis of participant responses, illustrated in Figure 1, revealed prominent keywords such as "online," "technology," "platform," and "website." Qualitative examination of the responses highlighted the role of technology in supporting the campaign's efforts. Participants described an online platform offering educational training on gender-based violence, featuring structured courses and certification. Additionally, an online crime reporting system was noted, enhancing accessibility and convenience for reporting crimes, particularly for those in remote areas. Participant feedback in Figure 2 also identified the technology used (website) and highlighted varying levels of awareness among respondents regarding the campaign's technological initiatives.

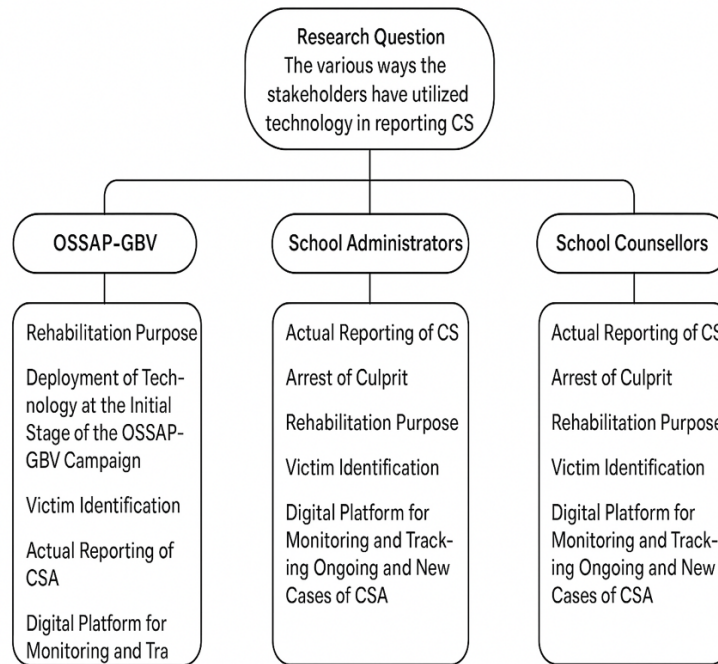
Thematic analysis of participants' views on the effectiveness of technology in the OSAA-GBV campaign revealed key themes, including increased reporting, empowerment of schools, and potential benefits of technology (Figure 3). Participants acknowledged efforts to create a platform and provide training, but highlighted challenges, such as "technology phobia" and limited adoption, hindering optimal utilisation and impact. Excerpts from participants illustrated these themes: increased reporting of child sexual abuse incidents after the campaign, schools were empowered to report incidents, with proactive outreach from principals and counsellors, while the e-platform could centralise and organise critical data, enhancing response to child sexual abuse.

However, participants also noted limitations, including: limited technology deployment and retention in schools, variability in perceived effectiveness among stakeholders and need for sustained engagement and technology integration. These findings suggest that while the organisation has taken steps to address child sexual abuse, challenges persist, and further efforts are needed to optimise the impact of technology deployment.

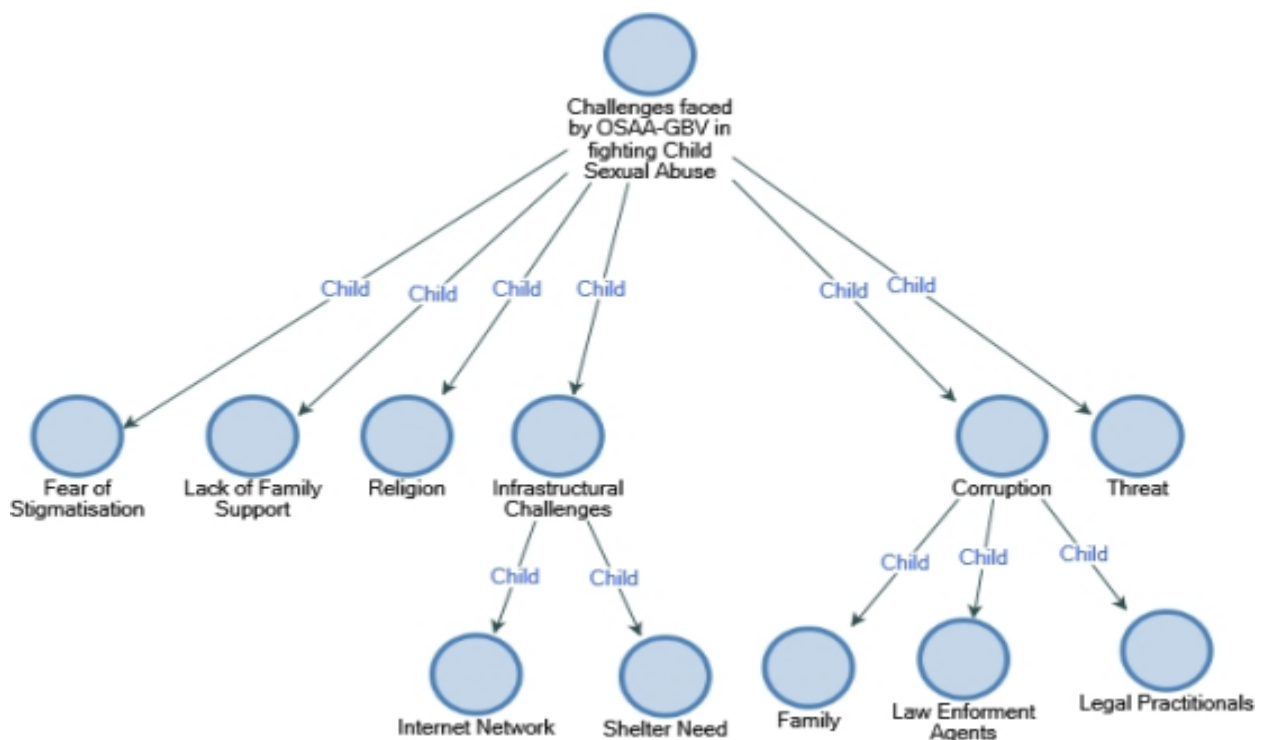


**Figure 3.** Participant Responses Mapped Against Emerging Themes

Source: The author



**Figure 4.** Data Grouping and Participant Mapping  
Source: The authors



**Figure 5.** Thematic Mapping of Challenges Faced by OSAA-GBV  
Source: The authors

Thematic analysis of OSAA-GBV personnel's responses revealed key areas of technology utilisation (in Figure 4), including: reporting of child sexual abuse cases, initial deployment of technology during the campaign, digital platform for monitoring and tracking CSA cases, rehabilitation purposes, identification of victims. Participants highlighted the importance of

technology in streamlining data collection and management, informing the organisation's response to CSA. However, stakeholders, including school administrators and counsellors, lacked familiarity with the intended technological approach as findings suggest: limited technology deployment and retention in schools, variability in perceived effectiveness among stakeholders, need for sustained engagement and technology integration, traditional methods (non-digital methods) persist, with potential gaps in leveraging technology for reporting and response. Participants' responses underscored the potential benefits of technology, including: centralising and organising critical data and enhancing response to CSA

Figure 5 illustrates the challenges encountered by the Ondo State Agency Against Gender-Based Violence (OSAA-GBV) in addressing child sexual abuse in public schools. Key obstacles include: inadequate family support: Family members often resist or discourage minors from seeking justice, religious beliefs can compromise the pursuit of justice for survivors, poor internet connectivity hinders accessibility to the agency's online platform, the absence of a safe haven significantly impedes effective case management and schools' limited utilisation of the platform restricts its potential impact. Participants highlighted the significance of these challenges, including: poor network connectivity which frustrates users and limits platform accessibility and despite training, many schools fail to utilise the platform, relying on non-digital reporting methods instead.

### **Discussion**

Child sexual abuse is an issue that requires effective reporting and management systems. Technology has the potential to enhance these systems, but its adoption is often hindered by various challenges (Hamilton-Giachritsis et al., 2021). There is a real challenge when it comes to getting technology fully integrated into child sexual abuse reporting and management systems. End-users are still heavily reliant on manual methods, which is a major roadblock to adopting digital technology. This is not exactly a new problem as previous research has shown that just because digital tools are available does not mean people will use them. There are all sorts of barriers that can get in the way of schools in Nigeria, especially in the study area, Ondo State from adopting technology for CSA, like lack of awareness, technology anxiety, infrastructure issues, and usability concerns (Granic & Marangunic, 2019; Frøsig, 2023). The technology acceptance model supports this observation, emphasising the critical role of perceived usefulness and ease of use in determining technology adoption.

The study highlights how digital technology is not being used to its full potential, especially in places where internet access is poor or people are not comfortable with technology. This underutilisation is one reason why manual reporting methods are still so common (van der Spuy et al., 2024; Schroder et al., 2024). Blending digital reporting with offline methods and the need for technology companies on board to help build safer, more effective platforms. Organisations like UNICEF (2021); WeProtect (2024) are already stressing the importance of this kind of collaboration.

Technology is still not fully integrated into child sexual abuse reporting and management systems. Stakeholders sticking to the status-quo (non-technological approach), which is a major hurdle for adopting digital technology and given what previous research has shown that digital tools often do not get used as much as they could be, due to certain obstacles (Granic & Marangunic, 2019; Frøsig, 2023).

It has been established that technology has the potential to improve reporting and management of child sexual abuse cases but that potential is not been realised yet in the Nigerian situation. The technology acceptance model (TAM), exactly emphasises how crucial it is for technology to be both useful and user-friendly in order for major stakeholder in various schools to make use of technology

to protect school children from becoming victims of child sexual abuse (Hamilton-Giachritsis et al., 2021; Thorn, 2024).

Technology can make a real difference, but only if the obstacles identified are addressed promptly (Thorn, 2024; Thorn, 2019). The report of UNICEF (2021); WeProtect (2024) recommend a mix of digital and offline approaches and the need for technology companies to build safer, more effective platforms. Digital platforms can actually make it easier for people to report abuse, get help faster, and access confidential support (van der Spuy et al., 2024; UNICEF, 2024). The transition to digital systems is hindered by barriers such as technology anxiety, inadequate training, and insufficient institutional support, which TAM identify as critical limitation to technology adoption, especially in managing CSA in schools (Hamilton-Giachritsis et al., 2021; van der Spuy et al., 2024; Thorn & WeProtect, 2024; UNICEF, 2024).

Introducing digital tools alone is insufficient for sustainable change, a more comprehensive approach is required to effectively deal with issues of CSA in Nigerian schools. Through the lens of change theory, technology-driven transformation in child protection necessitates a staged approach - awareness, interest, evaluation, trial, and adoption (Payne, 2024). The change theory provides a framework for understanding the process of transformation and the necessary steps, interventions, and mechanisms required to achieve widespread adoption of technology in child sexual abuse prevention and response.

The findings suggest that efforts to leverage technology in this context are still in the early stages of this process, with significant work needed to transition from awareness and trial to widespread adoption and standard practice. A comprehensive approach that engages diverse stakeholders, addresses systemic barriers, and ensures relevant and sustainable interventions is essential for building a resilient, technology-enabled child protection system (Thorn, 2019; National Centre for Action on Child Sexual Abuse, 2024).

## CONCLUSION

The content of the conclusion should be the answer to the research questions and objectives. The conclusion is presented in one paragraph, not points, and is not expressed in statistical sentences. The conclusion is completed with one paragraph of research result suggestions.

This research shows that technology can be a game-changer in improving access to education, training, and reporting mechanisms in management of child sexual abuse in Ondo State. Online platforms can provide crucial educational resources and make it easier for people to report abuse anonymously, which is especially important for stakeholders in the rural areas. However, the campaign's impact is being held back by some significant barriers, like people not knowing about the technology tools, feeling anxious about using them, and poor internet connectivity.

Stakeholders are still relying on non-digital reporting methods instead of using the e-platform that the Ondo State Agency Against Gender-Based Violence (OSAA-GBV) set up to make reporting and managing child sexual abuse cases more efficient. Our findings highlight the fact that technology can only make a real difference if issues that are holding people back, like lack of awareness, technology literacy, and infrastructure gaps are addressed. This finding is comparable to the report that technology can be a powerful tool in detecting, reporting, and managing child sexual abuse cases, but only if it is and properly adopted (Hamilton-Giachritsis et al., 2021; Gender-Based Violence Area of Responsibility Helpdesk, 2021).

Based on the study's findings, several recommendations are proposed. The Ondo State Government and OSAA-GBV should provide regular and mandatory digital literacy training for teachers, school counselors, administrators, students, and parents. Tailored training modules should

be developed to address varying literacy levels and focus on safe behaviors, recognising abuse, and using reporting mechanisms. OSAA-GBV should ensure that digital reporting and educational platforms are user-friendly, accessible in multiple languages, and inclusive for users. Targeted awareness campaigns should be launched in rural areas to inform people about the platforms and their benefits. The Ondo State Government should invest in reliable internet infrastructure for all schools to ensure consistent access to online reporting and educational resources. OSAA-GBV should provide alternative reporting channels, such as toll-free hotlines and SMS-based systems, to complement online systems. OSAA-GBV, in collaboration with the state government and partner organisations, should involve children and other stakeholders in the design and evaluation of technological interventions. Regular assessments and community engagement will help identify challenges, inform improvements, and ensure that solutions are culturally relevant and trusted.

#### Author Contribution

All authors declare having an equal contribution. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

#### Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

#### Data Availability Statement

The data is available by request to the author.

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