

Dynamics of Meaning-Making among Adult Survivors of Online Child Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (OCSEA)

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Abstract.

Online Child Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (OCSEA) is a form of technology-facilitated sexual violence that may have enduring psychological consequences extending into adulthood. Although previous studies have documented its adverse impacts, limited research has examined how adult survivors construct meaning from these experiences. This study aimed to explore the factors influencing the meaning-making process, understand the dynamics of meaning making, and identify the meanings reconstructed by adult survivors of OCSEA. This study employed a qualitative research design using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). Participant screening was conducted using the Global Psychotrauma Screen (GPS) to identify adult survivors who had experienced OCSEA during childhood or adolescence and demonstrated sufficient psychological functioning to reflect on their experiences. Three adult female survivors participated in semi-structured interviews. Data were analyzed using IPA and interpreted through Park's Meaning Making Model. The findings indicate that meaning making is a complex, dynamic, and non-linear process influenced by both internal and external factors. Internal factors included emotional needs, self-reflection, and future aspirations, whereas external factors comprised healthy interpersonal relationships, psychoeducation, and exposure to information regarding sexual violence. Participants experienced disruptions in their global meaning concerning themselves, interpersonal relationships, and the digital world, which motivated cognitive and emotional meaning-making processes. These processes resulted in adaptive meaning made, including identity reconstruction, greater independence, increased interpersonal and digital vigilance, and the development of new life purposes, such as educating others, supporting family members, and helping individuals with similar experiences. These findings highlight the diverse pathways through which adult survivors integrate traumatic experiences into meaningful life narratives.

Keywords: *Meaning-Making, OCSEA, Survivors of Online Child Sexual Exploitation and Abuse*

1. INTRODUCTION

The development of digital technology has fundamentally transformed the way individuals interact, form identities, and express social relationships (Ramadhani & Jatnika, 2024). This rapid digital transformation has not only brought benefits in communication and education but has also opened new avenues for various forms of online based violence. One of the most alarming forms is Online Child Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (OCSEA), which encompasses psychological manipulation, extortion, and the production and distribution of child sexual content (Finkelhor et al., 2022). A report by the WeProtect Global Alliance (2025) indicates that more than one in three children worldwide has experienced online sexual abuse, representing an increase of approximately 25% compared to 2022. In Indonesia, SIMFONIPPA data (2025) recorded 16,665 cases of sexual violence against children, while UNICEF (2022) reported that most OCSEA victims are unaware they are being abused because such interactions are often disguised within seemingly normal digital relationships.

The impact of OCSEA on children is not merely short term psychological, it also affects emotional, social, and self identity development well into adulthood. Children who experience online exploitation often exhibit symptoms of hidden trauma such as dissociation, shame, loss of trust, or persistent identity confusion that persists into adulthood (Herman, 2015). Whittle et al. (2021) explains that the process of online grooming creates an illusion of intimacy and a sense of security that makes it difficult for children to distinguish healthy digital relationships from exploitative ones. As a result, the trauma experienced is not immediately recognized, but resurfaces later in life as an inexplicable emotional experience. This impact

makes OCSEA a form of complex relational trauma, where social relationships that should be safe instead become a source of deep psychological wounds.

There is many victims experience psychological distress due to online abuse, but some individuals demonstrate adaptive resilience to survive and even grow from these traumatic experiences. As they reach adulthood, some survivors who have experienced OCSEA begin to revisit their past experiences with a different perspective. Adults who have experienced childhood sexual abuse or adult survivors (Halimatussa'diah, 2025). They faces a challenging process of self reflection: on one hand, they must confront traumatic memories and on the other hand, they strive to find new meaning in those experiences. Tedeschi et al. (2025), through Posttraumatic Growth (PTG), explain that individuals can experience positive changes through a reflective process regarding trauma, such as an increased understanding of life, heightened sensitivity to social relationships, and a shift in self identity toward a more meaningful direction.

In the context of psychology, meaning-making is central to the process of recovery and the integration of life experiences. Park (2010, 2013) explains that meaning-making is the process by which individuals reinterpret stressful or traumatic experiences and connect them to their personal meaning systems, thereby generating new understandings of themselves and the world. Through this process, individuals strive to resolve the discrepancy between their life beliefs (global meaning) and the real world experiences that challenge them (situational meaning). In the case of OCSEA, this dynamic becomes more complex because experiences of abuse are often not recognized as violence but rather as ordinary social interactions, until reflective awareness emerges in adulthood. Kaye-Tzadok and Icekson (2022) add that individuals who experienced childhood abuse often exhibit pseudo-growth, which later develops into authentic growth after undergoing a process of deep meaning reflection.

Empirical research supports the notion that online sexual abuse leaves far reaching psychological impacts that can persist into adulthood. Budde et al. (2022) found that digital sexual boundary violations induce feelings of shame and emotional dissociation in adolescents, while Wachs et al. (2021) reported a link between sexting behavior and depression and self harm. Strickland et al. (2023) even found that repeated exposure to child sexual exploitation material can cause severe moral and emotional distress, even among professionals handling such cases. However, these studies have primarily highlighted psychological symptoms and emotional impacts, without delving deeply into how adult survivors understand and construct meaning from their OCSEA experiences.

Previous research also highlights gaps in OCSEA studies. Page et al. (2025) note that OCSEA studies remain fragmented in terms of definitions and methodology, while research in Indonesia (Novianti & Chusairi, 2024) continues to focus on legal and prevention aspects. Meanwhile, Yorza & Shanti (2025) examined meaning-making among survivors of sexual violence but did not address the context of digital abuse. Therefore, an empirical gap remains in understanding how adult OCSEA survivors reflect on their childhood experiences and construct new meanings from them. Such a study is important for expanding scientific understanding of digital trauma and enriching meaning-making theory (Park, 2010) within the context of the psychological phenomenology of OCSEA survivors in Indonesia.

Based on the background of the issue, this study is framed around an exploratory question focusing on how adult survivors of Online Child Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (OCSEA) during childhood construct and reconstruct meaning regarding those experiences in the present, specifically investigating the dynamics of the meaning-making process, what emerges from this process in their lives, and the factors that influence it to explore subjective meanings, awareness, and self-understanding. To ensure a deep and contextual phenomenological approach, the scope is strictly limited to the reflective psychological processes of adult survivors aged 18 and older who have achieved reflective awareness of their childhood or adolescent OCSEA experiences, focusing entirely on subjective experiences rather than legal, social, technical, behavioral, or prevalence generalizations, and excluding clinical interventions or therapeutic evaluations. Consequently, the research focus is tightly centered on identifying the factors influencing how these adult survivors interpret and make sense of the OCSEA events, and understanding the specific meanings that emerge after they reflect on those experiences as adults.

II. METHODS

Type or Design of Research

This study employs a qualitative approach with an interpretive phenomenological design. The qualitative approach is used to gain an in-depth understanding of individuals' subjective experiences, particularly how individuals interpret significant and complex life experiences within their psychological context (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The phenomenological design focuses on exploring lived experience as experienced and felt by individuals, without aiming to generalize the research findings. An interpretive phenomenological approach was used in this study because experiences of Online Child Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (OCSEA) are personal, emotional, and often only become fully realized and interpreted reflectively once individuals have reached adulthood. In this context, experience is not merely understood as an objective event but as a subjective experience that is interpreted through the individual's process of reflection and interpretation of themselves and the world around them (Eatough & Smith, 2017).

Theoretically, the interpretive phenomenological approach is grounded in the view that the meaning of human experience cannot be separated from the process of interpretation. Experience is understood through the interaction between the individual experiencing the event and the researcher seeking to understand the meaning of that experience. Therefore, this approach allows researchers to explore how participants understand, interpret, and reconstruct the meaning of the OCSEA experiences they had during childhood once they have become adults. This approach is also idiographic, meaning it emphasizes an in-depth analysis of each participant's individual experience before seeking broader patterns of meaning. The research focus is not on generalizing results but on gaining a deep understanding of the psychological dynamics and meaning-making processes experienced by each participant (Shinebourne, 2011). Thus, the use of the interpretive phenomenological qualitative approach in this study aims to gain a comprehensive understanding of the dynamics of meaning-making among adult survivors of OCSEA. This approach allows the researcher to explore how these experiences are recognized, reinterpreted, and integrated into the participants' self-understanding in adulthood.

Research Setting and Timing

a. Research Setting

This study will be conducted flexibly, accommodating participants' preferences for in-person or online sessions, with a focus on adult survivors who have experienced Online Child Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (OCSEA). Participants choosing the online option may participate via a mutually agreed-upon communication platform, while those opting for in-person sessions may meet at a safe and comfortable location. In its implementation, this study adheres to principles of psychological safety, confidentiality, and research ethics, given that the topic under investigation involves traumatic experiences. Therefore, the research context is supported by a professional environment that ensures psychological support is available if needed.

b. Research Timeline

This research will be conducted from November 2025 to May 2026, encompassing the research preparation phase, data collection through in-depth interviews, transcription, data analysis, and the writing of the research report. Data collection was conducted in stages and flexibly, adapting to the participants' readiness and circumstances, given that the research topic involves traumatic experiences requiring ethical considerations and psychological safety.

Table 1. Research Data Collection Schedule

No	Activities	Date	Duration
1	Conducting the 1st online interview with participant 1	24/01/2026 (20.00 PM)	45 Minutes
2	Conducting the 1st offline interview with participant 2	25/01/2026 (08.30 AM)	55 Minutes

3	Conducting the 1st offline interview with participant 3	02/02/2026 (08.30 AM)	1 Hour 35 Minutes
4	Conducting the 2nd online interview with participant 1	07/02/2026 (20.00 PM)	1 Hour 3 Minutes
5	Conducting the 2nd online interview with participant 2	15/02/2026 (08.30 AM)	1 Hour 5 Minutes
6	Conducting the 2nd offline interview with participant 3	01/03/2026 (08.30 AM)	1 Hour 7 Minutes

Data Collection Techniques and Instruments

Semi-Structured Interviews

The primary instrument in this study is the semi-structured in-depth interview. Interviews were used to explore the subjective experiences of participants as adult survivors of Online Child Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (OCSEA), specifically regarding how participants understand, interpret, and reflect on the traumatic experiences they have endured. The use of interviews in qualitative research aims to gain a deep understanding of an individual's life experiences from the participant's perspective (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The semi-structured interview was chosen because it provides flexibility for the researcher to explore participants' experiences in depth while still adhering to a framework of questions relevant to the research objectives. This approach allows meanings and narratives of experiences to emerge naturally from the participants' perspectives (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015).

The interview guidelines were developed based on the Meaning Making Model proposed by Park (2010) to facilitate the exploration of participants' experiences in making sense of traumatic events. The stages in this model include global meaning, potentially stressful situation, and situational meaning (discrepancy, meaning-making process, and meaning made). This framework was then expanded into indicators and open-ended questions used in the interviews.

In addition to semi-structured in-depth interviews, this study also utilized the Global Psychotrauma Screen (GPS) as a supporting instrument in the participant screening process. The GPS is a brief screening tool developed by the Global Collaboration on Traumatic Stress to identify the psychological impact of traumatic events as well as protective factors such as resilience and individual functioning (Olf et al., 2020). In the context of this study, the Global Psychotrauma Screen (GPS) was used during the pre-survey phase to assess the psychological readiness of prospective participants and ensure they possessed sufficient emotional capacity to undergo in-depth interviews without the risk of retraumatization. The screening process was conducted using two items from the Global Psychotrauma Screen (GPS) that assess individual resilience and functioning, with a minimum score of 7 on a 1–10 scale serving as an indicator of eligibility for participation. The Global Psychotrauma Screen (GPS) used was translated and adapted to the Indonesian cultural context by Primasari (2020–2021a, 2020–2021b). The Global Psychotrauma Screen (GPS) is not used as a clinical diagnostic tool, is not analyzed quantitatively, and is not used as the primary data source for the study. Its use serves solely as an ethical and preventive measure to ensure the safety and psychological well-being of adult OCSEA survivor participants throughout the research process.

Table 2. Demographic Data of the Study Participants

Categories	Participant 1	Participant 2	Participant 3
Initial	D	E	R
Sex	Female	Female	Female
Current Age	22	21	27
Employment	Internship Employee	Massage Therapist	Corporate Employee
Domicile	Gresik	Kediri	Surabaya
Marriage Status	Not Yet Married	Not Yet Married	Married
Form of OCSEA Experience	Grooming Sexting CSAM Sextortion Live Stream	Grooming Sexting CSAM Sextortion	Grooming Sexting CSAM Sextortion
Age of OCSEA Experience	11	16	9
Survivor Prediction*	Reporting Resilience and Self-Functioning	Reporting Resilience and Self-Functioning	Reporting Resilience and Self-Functioning

Notes. *Screening results of the Global Psychotrauma Screen (GPS)

Interviews were conducted both online and in person, tailored to participants circumstances and comfort levels. Interviews took place in a safe, private setting that supported participants psychological safety. The entire interview process was conducted with participants' consent and recorded for transcription and data analysis purposes.

Data Validity Testing and Analysis Techniques

To ensure that the data obtained accurately and reliably reflect the participants' experiences without relying on statistical metrics, this study establishes qualitative data validity through credibility, dependability, and confirmability (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Credibility is maintained via reflective in-depth interviews, open participant expression (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015), and member checks to verify transcript consistency; dependability is secured by systematically documenting the entire research process from participant selection to analysis (Creswell & Poth, 2018); and confirmability is ensured by grounding findings strictly in participant data through continuous researcher self-reflection and supervisory discussions to minimize bias (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Data analysis is conducted using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) to explore and interpret the subjective meaning-making processes embedded within the participants lived experiences (Kahija, 2017). Following the systematic stages outlined by Kahija (2017), the analysis begins with reading and comprehending the data thoroughly through repeated transcript reviews to

build a deep data connection, followed by conducting initial noting on content, language, and implied meanings to generate exploratory comments. Next, the researcher develops emergent themes that concisely capture the essence of patterns of meaning, which are then organized and grouped into broader, cohesive frameworks to identify superordinate themes. Finally, the process concludes by identifying patterns across participants to compare similarities and differences, thereby providing a comprehensive, in-depth description of how participants interpret their experiences of online sexual harassment and integrate them into their lives.

III. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

1. Overview of the Study Participants OCSEA Experiences

a. Participant 1/S1

Participant 1 (D) is a 22 years old woman who began experiencing violence and abuse during elementary school at age 11. The initial experience occurred when Participant 1 (D) transferred schools and faced social rejection from her new environment. In that situation, Participant 1 (D) experienced social and verbal bullying, such as physical assaults, extortion, and exclusion by peers. In that context, one male classmate forced Participant 1 (D) to unlock her cell phone and used her social media account (Facebook) to post sexually explicit content, such as a status update reading “Pipis Jelly.” Participant 1 (D) explained that after the incident, they received many sexually suggestive comments and private messages from others, including the sending of genital images and invitations to engage in sexual activities. This experience illustrates an early form of OCSEA experienced by Participant 1 (D), in which exploitation occurred through the misuse of digital identity and exposure to sexual content. At that age, Participant 1 (D) did not yet have an understanding of sexual abuse, so the resulting response tended to be silence and bottling up feelings, accompanied only by prolonged fear, confusion, and shame.

Additionally, Participant 1 (D) also experienced sexual threats via chat from peers (sextortion), such as being forced to touch their breasts and having their clothes forcibly removed. This situation was exacerbated by a lack of support from the school environment, where Participant 1 (D)’s report was not followed up by school officials. Upon entering junior high school (SMP), Participant 1 (D) again experienced a form of sexual exploitation within the context of a dating relationship. Initially, the perpetrator built an emotional connection by showing affection, giving gifts, and introducing Participant 1 (D) to their family. However, the relationship later evolved into a form of manipulation (grooming), where the perpetrator gradually pressured Participant 1 (D) to engage in sexual activities, including sending personal photos, videos, and engaging in sexual video calls (sexting).

During this process, the perpetrator used threats as a form of control, specifically by stating that they would distribute the private content if Participant 1 (D) did not comply with their demands (sextortion). Participant 1 (D) revealed that they complied with these demands out of fear of reliving the traumatic experiences they had endured during elementary school, particularly regarding the distribution of content to others (CSAM). The relationship continued until the 8th grade of junior high school and ended because the perpetrator unilaterally terminated it. This indicates an imbalance of power in the relationship, where the perpetrator held complete dominance over the dynamics of the relationship.

During the early years of college, the OCSEA experience continued with sexual violence from a college friend, including sexual comments, invitations to engage in video calls for sexual purposes (sexting), and the sending of genital images (CSEM). Additionally, Participant 1 (D) was also unintentionally exposed to sexual content via the OmeTV live streaming platform, where other users displayed their genitalia. However, there was a difference in response during this phase, as Participant 1 (D) tended to ignore and not react to such behavior. Overall, Participant 1 (D)’s OCSEA experiences occurred repeatedly in various forms, ranging from exploitation via social media to manipulation within interpersonal relationships. These experiences did not occur during a single time period but developed from childhood through late adolescence and involved various different social contexts.

b. Participant 2/S2

Participant 2 (E) began experiencing OCSEA incidents in late 2021 at age 16 through an anonymous messaging platform (Telegram), which later led to personal interactions with a man significantly older than

her. The relationship developed rapidly through the provision of attention and emotional closeness (grooming), leading Participant 2 (E) to begin trusting the perpetrator. In the process, communication that was initially general gradually shifted toward more personal and sensitive topics. Over time, these interactions evolved into sexually suggestive communication (sexting), including intimate conversations and requests to send personal photos and videos (CSEM). The perpetrator also exhibited controlling behavior, such as dictating activities, restricting social interactions, and repeatedly demanding self-documentation. The relationship, which initially took place online, later progressed to in-person meetings in early 2022, leading to sexual activity that occurred six times. Although the parents were aware of it at one point, the communication continued in secret.

Participant 2 (E) realized that what they were experiencing was a form of abuse, because Participant 2 (E) was a member of Peer Counselor and thus knew information about abuse, however, due to a background marked by the absence of a father figure during their upbringing, Participant 2 (E) viewed the perpetrator's behavior as permissible within certain limits for instance, it was acceptable but must not result in pregnancy. This series of events lasted for approximately two years. Within the dynamics of the relationship, there was psychological pressure through demeaning statements. The relationship eventually ended when Participant 2 (E) decided to end it because they felt constrained, felt it was incompatible with achieving their future aspirations, and realized the negative impacts they were experiencing, especially as they were about to enter college.

c. **Participant 3/S3**

Participant 3 (F), a 27-year-old woman who experienced sexual violence and exploitation beginning in childhood and recurring in various contexts into adulthood. During her elementary school years, Participant 3 (M) experienced another incident involving grooming, an attempt by a neighbor in her neighborhood to befriend her which culminated in her being shown child sexual exploitation material (CSEM) and nearly being subjected to physical abuse, though this did not occur because someone arrived. Requests for personal sexual content, sexually suggestive messages (sexting), and the sending of inappropriate content from both known and unknown individuals (CSEM).

Additionally, in interpersonal relationships, Participant 3 (M) also experienced dynamics involving pressure and threats, particularly within romantic relationships (boyfriend), where there were demands for the sending of personal content accompanied by threats of dissemination (sextortion). Exposure to sexual content also occurred through live-streaming platforms (Bigo Live and Tomi). Overall, M's experience demonstrates a recurring pattern of childhood experiences, public harassment, and digital exploitation from adolescence through adulthood. These events occurred across various social contexts and involved diverse perpetrators, ranging from those in the immediate environment to those encountered through online interactions.

2. The Dynamics of Meaning Making in OCSEA Experiences

a. **Global Meaning**

Before experiencing OCSEA, all three participants had relatively positive underlying beliefs about themselves, others, and the world around them. This belief became the basis for looking at the various experiences they faced before the OCSEA event occurred. In terms of self-view, Participant 1 describes himself as a confident, cheerful, active, and easy to interact with others. Participants felt comfortable in a variety of social environments and did not have difficulty building friendships. His ability to speak in public and his involvement in various school activities strengthened his belief in his abilities.

Participant 2 also showed a positive self-view. He sees himself as an individual who is easy to get along with, quickly gets along with others, and is able to build social relationships with various circles. Before experiencing OCSEA, participants described themselves as cheerful and open in interaction. In contrast to the two participants, Participant 3 described himself as a shy person and tended to be quiet. Participants also admitted that they sometimes lack confidence. Despite this, participants still had the ability to establish social relationships, although they were more selective in choosing friends and took longer to build closeness with others.

In addition to having certain beliefs about themselves, the three participants also showed a relatively positive view of others, especially men. Participant 1 viewed men as equal friends and safe to interact with. Childhood experiences filled with positive interactions made participants not see any threats in relationships with men. Participant 2 also showed trust in men, especially in friendship relationships and emotional closeness. Meanwhile, Participant 3 views men as good, strong, and have a role as protectors of women. These findings suggest that all three participants tend to view men as trustworthy and harmless figures.

Other findings showed that the three participants interpreted the digital world as a positive and safe space. For Participant 1, social media serves as a place to share experiences, store memories, express feelings, and interact with friends. Participant 2 viewed the digital world primarily as a means of entertainment and never imagined that the interactions that occur in it could develop into risky experiences. Meanwhile, Participant 3 used social media to find friends, get entertainment, and fill their free time. Third, participants did not view social media as a space that has the potential to cause sexual exploitation or violence.

Overall, before experiencing OCSEA, all three participants had relatively positive baseline beliefs about themselves, others, and the digital world. They see themselves as individuals who are able to establish social relationships, trust others as safe beings, and see social media as a space that supports social interaction, entertainment, and self-expression.

b. Appraised Event Meaning

The findings of the study showed that participants' initial assessment of OCSEA's experiences was dominated by feelings of fear, confusion, the need to maintain relationships, and limitations in understanding these experiences as a form of sexual violence. In the early stages, participants focused more on the immediate consequences that might occur, such as the threat of spreading personal content, losing contact with the perpetrator, or the social impact they might experience.

In Participant 1, OCSEA's experience was interpreted as a situation that threatened his personal safety and social reputation. The threat of sharing personal photos and videos reminded participants of traumatic experiences they had experienced before when sexual content was spread through social media. The fear of reexperiencing similar events made participants choose to follow the perpetrator's request as an effort to avoid consequences that were considered worse. In addition, the threats of physical violence received also cause deep fear. At a very young age, participants admitted that they had not been able to tell their parents or others about the situation they experienced, so that the fear was more hidden by themselves.

The findings also showed that Participant 1 had difficulty recognizing the experience she experienced as a form of sexual violence. In elementary school and junior high school, participants focused more on preventing the spread of personal content and maintaining relationships with the perpetrator rather than understanding that they were experiencing sexual exploitation and violence. Thus, the experience was initially not interpreted as an act of violence, but rather as a situation that must be faced in order to avoid a greater threat.

In contrast to Participant 1 who was more dominated by fear of threats, Participant 2 interpreted OCSEA's experience in the context of the emotional relationship established with the perpetrator. The attention, closeness, and affection given by the perpetrator make participants try to maintain the relationship even though there are behaviors that make them uncomfortable. Participants admitted that they often tolerated the actions of the perpetrators because they were worried about losing the attention and affection they had received. In this situation, the need for emotional closeness is the main consideration in assessing the experience experienced. As a result, actions that are actually exploitative are not directly perceived as forms of violence, but rather as part of the relationship that must be maintained.

Selain itu, Partisipan 2 juga menunjukkan adanya proses normalisasi terhadap perilaku pelaku. Pengalaman yang berulang membuat tindakan yang pada awalnya dirasakan mengganggu perlahan dianggap sebagai sesuatu yang biasa. Partisipan mengungkapkan bahwa setelah beberapa kali mengalami situasi serupa, perilaku tersebut mulai diterima sebagai bagian dari realitas hubungan yang dijalani. Temuan ini menunjukkan bahwa frekuensi pengalaman yang berulang memengaruhi cara partisipan memaknai peristiwa yang dialaminya.

Meanwhile, Participant 3 showed a different assessment pattern. The experience of exploitation and abuse that has occurred since childhood has led participants to no longer view some forms of OCSEA behavior as something entirely new or surprising. Participants admitted that the experience was not too scary because it had similarities to previous experiences. Nevertheless, participants began to show greater awareness of the risks that might occur. This can be seen from the desire to take action if the threat is truly realized, including considering reporting to the authorities. On the other hand, participants also showed ambivalence in dealing with the situation. Despite several times rejecting the perpetrator's request, the participant once fulfilled one of the requests due to the curiosity and pressure he constantly received. After the incident, participants began to question the consequences of the actions that had been taken.

Overall, the participants' initial assessment of OCSEA's experiences was characterized by fear, confusion, a need for safety and affection, and limitations in recognizing these experiences as forms of sexual violence. Participants focused more on threats of a direct nature, such as the spread of personal content, loss of relationships, or social consequences that may arise. In these conditions, the response shown tends to be in the form of obedience to the perpetrator, maintaining relationships, tolerating the behavior experienced, or considering the experience as something normal.

c. **Discrepancy & Distress**

The findings of the study show that the OCSEA experience brings out a mismatch between the beliefs that participants previously had and the reality they experienced. Before experiencing OCSEA, participants viewed interpersonal relationships as a safe space, trusting others, and having certain beliefs about themselves and their body safety. However, experiences of exploitation, manipulation, threats, and violations of personal boundaries have made these beliefs begin to be questioned.

In Participant 2, inconsistencies appeared in the way interpersonal relationships were perceived. Before experiencing OCSEA, participants interpreted the relationship with the perpetrator as a source of affection, attention, and emotional support. In fact, participants viewed the perpetrator as a figure who could replace the role of father and friend in his life. However, as the relationship progresses, the behavior of the perpetrator increasingly contradicts the expectations and values that the participants have. Although participants are aware that the behavior leads to abuse, the need for affection makes them ambivalent. On the one hand, the participant understands that he is being treated inappropriately, but on the other hand, he finds it difficult to let go of the relationship because he is afraid of losing the attention and affection that he has gained.

Meanwhile, Participant 3 showed a discrepancy when the reality he experienced was not in accordance with the values and understanding that he had been believing in. Participants expressed surprise when they realized that there were people who were doing actions that were contrary to the norms taught since childhood. This confusion is further amplified by a lack of social support when the experiences told to others do not gain full trust. This condition makes participants question their understanding of security and trust in others.

The mismatch also appears in the way participants view themselves. Participant 1 and Participant 3 began to question why the experience was happening to them. Both expressed reflective questions about what was wrong with them until they became victims of the treatment. The questions suggest a shake-up of the previous belief that they are good individuals and should not be subjected to painful treatment. In Participant 2, the inconsistencies appeared more in the form of concerns about possible consequences, such as pregnancy and other impacts of the relationship. Although at first they tried to refuse, pressure and persuasion from the perpetrator made the participants finally follow the perpetrator's wishes.

In addition, Participant 3 also experienced confusion when his experience contradicted the understanding of body boundaries taught by his parents since childhood. Participants understand that certain parts of the body should not be touched by others, but the reality they experience shows a violation of these restrictions. This situation causes an even stronger fear, especially when accompanied by threats from the perpetrator.

The discrepancy between previous beliefs and OCSEA's experiences gave rise to various forms of emotional distress in the three participants. Participant 1 showed the most intense stress, characterized by

fear, prolonged anxiety, overthinking, loss of energy, and a tendency to withdraw from the social environment. Participants admitted that they had difficulty carrying out daily activities and focused more on feelings of fear and negative thoughts that continued to arise.

In more severe conditions, the emotional distress experienced by Participant 1 develops into feelings of hopelessness, loss of zest for life, sleep disturbances, decreased appetite, and the emergence of self-harm behavior as a way of channeling emotions that are unable to be expressed. Participants also expressed a desire to continue sleeping so that they do not have to face the thoughts and emotions that arise when awake.

Participant 3 also experienced emotional distress characterized by difficulty sleeping, loss of appetite, the appearance of dreams related to traumatic experiences, and repeated feelings of panic. The experience continues to be remembered and affects the emotional state of the participants even after the event has passed. Meanwhile, in Participant 2, emotional distress appeared more in the form of repetitive thoughts about the experiences they had experienced and the comments they had received from the perpetrator.

The research findings also showed that OCSEA's experiences remained firmly stored in the memories of the three participants. Situations that bear a resemblance to past experiences, such as news of sexual assault or other people's stories, often bring back memories of those experiences. Participants described this condition as the appearance of flashbacks, feelings of panic, sadness, and repetitive thoughts about what had happened.

In addition, all participants experienced feelings of shame, low self-esteem, and decreased self-confidence after experiencing OCSEA. The experience is seen as something that is difficult to tell others because of concerns about social judgment. As a result, participants become more likely to feel insecure, less confident in interacting, and more cautious in establishing relationships with others.

Overall, the findings suggest that OCSEA's experience brings out a mismatch between participants' previous beliefs and the reality they experience. These inconsistencies are seen in the way participants view interpersonal relationships, self, body safety, and trust in others. These conditions are accompanied by various forms of emotional distress, ranging from fear, confusion, anxiety, and overthinking to impaired daily functioning, which shows the magnitude of the psychological impact of OCSEA's experience on participants' lives.

d. Meaning Making Process

The *meaning-making* process in the three participants showed that the meaning of OCSEA's experience took place through a dynamic interaction between an automatic process and a deliberate process, between an attempt to maintain old beliefs and change them, between the search for understanding the experience and the search for broader meaning, as well as through the simultaneous involvement of cognitive and emotional aspects. In the initial stage, the three participants experienced an automated process characterized by the emergence of intrusive thoughts, regrets, dreams, flashbacks, and reflective questions that arise spontaneously after the OCSEA experience. Participant 1 repeatedly questioned why the experience had to happen to him, regretted the decision to change schools, and experienced a reappearance of traumatic memories that raised the question "why should I?".

Participant 2 also experienced the appearance of dreams and reflective questions about the reason she maintained a relationship with the perpetrator, while Participant 3 spontaneously questioned the treatment of women and why the experience could occur. Over time, the automated process develops into a more deliberate process, where participants begin to consciously try to understand their experiences through self-reflection, relationship evaluation, seeking psychological help, making life decisions, and reinterpreting the experiences they experience. Participant 1 began to open up to psychologists, express experiences through writing, and gain new understanding through healthier romantic relationships. Participant 2 evaluated the relationship they were in, considered the impact on the future, until finally deciding to end the relationship that was considered no longer healthy. Meanwhile, Participant 3 reflected on the experience as a source of learning and began to see the positive impact that could be learned from the experience. In this process, there is also a dynamic between assimilation and accommodation. In the initial phase, Participant 1 and Participant 2 tend to assimilate by interpreting experiences according to their pre-existing belief systems. Participant 1

focused more on fear of the spread of content and maintaining a relationship with the perpetrator rather than understanding the experience as a form of sexual violence, while Participant 2 interpreted the perpetrator's behavior as part of the affection and emotional needs that have not been met so that the experience is normalized.

However, as they age, experience, and knowledge increase, both show the process of accommodation through a change in the meaning system, namely beginning to understand the experience experienced as sexual harassment, grooming, and unhealthy relationships. In Participant 3, the process of meaning was more visible through changes in beliefs, increased alertness, and the development of adaptive strategies than through the dynamics of assimilation and explicit accommodation. In addition, all participants demonstrated an effort *to search for comprehensibility* through questions about why the experience happened to them, why they became victims, and what caused the event to happen. Questions such as "what is wrong with me?", "why should I?", or "why would anyone do such a thing?" reflect an attempt to understand the causes and meaning of traumatic experiences.

On the other hand, the process *of searching for significance* arises when participants begin to discover new lessons, values, and goals from the experience. Participant 1 began to view her experience as a means of education to make others more aware of online sexual violence, Participant 2 interpreted it as a turning point to rise up and build a better future, while Participant 3 saw the experience as a lesson about the importance of independence, carefulness in relationships, and encouragement to help other survivors. The whole process also shows the involvement of cognitive and emotional aspects simultaneously. From the cognitive side, the participants reflected, evaluated relationships, reinterpreted experiences, and made decisions that helped them build a new understanding of the OCSEA experience. From the emotional side, the process of meaning takes place through various affective responses such as fear, sadness, shame, denial, anxiety, trauma, crying, to efforts to manage and control negative emotions that arise.

Participant 1 showed a denial and avoidance response to information related to a similar case, Participant 2 experienced sadness and inner conflict before finally trying to control his emotions, while Participant 3 faced fear, panic, and overthinking tendencies that he then consciously attempted to control. These findings suggest that the process *of meaning-making* in OCSEA survivors is not a linear process, but rather develops through a complex interaction between cognitive reflection and emotional processing, gradually allowing participants to build new understandings, change previously held meaning systems, and discover new lessons and purpose from traumatic experiences they have experienced.

e. Meaning Made

Meaning made consists of several main processes that show how participants begin to reconstruct OCSEA experiences that were previously difficult to understand into experiences that have more structured and adaptive meaning. A sense of having "made sense" refers to a condition when individuals begin to understand OCSEA's previously confusing and unrecognized OCSEA experience as a form of sexual violence. This understanding arises through a meaning-making process that is influenced by self-reflection, interpersonal experiences, and access to information. In Participant 1, this understanding develops through interactions with healthier relationships that allow them to reflect back on past experiences and realize that behaviors that were once considered normal in romantic relationships are now a form of abuse. Participant 2 gained understanding through social media exposure and similar cases experienced by others, so she began to reconstruct the experience as a form of grooming. Meanwhile, Participant 3 gained an understanding through formal education about sexual violence in schools and seminars, which helped her realize that experiences that were not previously perceived as harassment turned out to be inappropriate behavior. Overall, this process suggests that "making sense" occurs gradually through reflection, social comparisons, and external information that allows participants to build a new, more coherent narrative of their traumatic experiences.

Acceptance describes the process of accepting a traumatic experience without denying or belittling the event, but is characterized by the ability to manage emotions and move on with life adaptively. In Participant 1, acceptance was seen from a reduction in the intensity of emotional distress and an increase in the ability to control emotions when remembering the experience. Participant 2 showed acceptance through a

decrease in the intensity of grief and the appearance of a detached attitude, although memories of the experience remained. Meanwhile, Participant 3 showed a more realistic-oriented acceptance, namely by accepting the incident as part of life and shifting the focus to efforts to protect themselves and their children in the future. In general, acceptance develops gradually through a decrease in negative emotions, increased emotion regulation, as well as the ability to integrate traumatic experiences into life without losing future orientation.

Reattribution describes a change in the way participants understand the causes of OCSEA experiences from previously tending to blame themselves or experiencing confusion to a more realistic and contextual understanding. Participant 1 initially questioned herself and felt that there was something wrong with her, but later realized that the experience was a form of sexual harassment committed by another party. Participant 2 changed his understanding by realizing that the relationship he experienced involved emotional manipulation and relationship inequality, and was influenced by unmet needs for affection. Participant 3 also experienced a change in understanding by realizing that the experience was a form of harassment reinforced by threats and pressure from the perpetrator. Overall, reattribution shows a shift from self-blame to a more complex understanding of the role of manipulation, power, and relational factors in the experience experienced.

Perceptions of growth show that there are positive changes that arise after the meaning-making process of the OCSEA experience. Participant 1 experienced increased selectivity in choosing a social environment and growing independence. Participant 2 showed broader development, including increased self-confidence, psychological resilience, as well as the ability to read other people's characters and recognize unhealthy relationships. Participant 3 showed increased empathy, social concern, and a strong drive to help others in similar situations. In general, all three participants showed a form of post-traumatic growth characterized by increased resilience, the ability to set boundaries, and the emergence of an orientation to protect and help others, even though the traumatic experience still left an emotional trace.

Changed identity describes changes in the way participants perceive themselves, perform social roles, and form new identities after the OCSEA experience. All three participants showed a shift from pre-trauma identities to more selective, independent, and adaptive identities. Participant 1 became more cautious in social interactions, Participant 2 developed an identity as a survivor who was more independent and had strong interpersonal boundaries, while Participant 3 developed an identity as a helper as well as a more protective figure, especially in his role as a parent. These changes suggest that trauma not only affects psychological conditions, but also contributes to a more complex and adaptive reconstruction of self-identity.

Reappraised meaning of stressor describes a change in the assessment of OCSEA's experience from an event that was initially seen as a source of suffering to an experience that contains learning and self-strengthening values. Participant 1 began to interpret the experience as a difficult but meaningful phase of emotional development. Participant 2 saw the experience as a source of the formation of self-resilience, alertness, and the ability to face life. Participant 3 interpreted it as a lesson to be more selective, independent, and vigilant in social relations. Although the experience remains painful, participants begin to integrate it as part of the psychological growth process.

Changed global beliefs indicate a change in fundamental beliefs about oneself, others, and the world. After the OCSEA experience, participants tend to develop more protective, cautious, and selective beliefs. Self-confidence shifts towards independence, while confidence in others, especially men, becomes more cautious and even tends to decrease in trust levels. In addition, the digital world is also seen as a space that is not completely safe so it requires high vigilance. However, some participants also developed new, more adaptive beliefs, such as the belief that they were able to survive, recover, and protect themselves from similar experiences in the future.

Changed global goals and meaning of life describes the change in life orientation and existential meaning after the OCSEA experience. Participant 1 shows a desire to use his life experience as an educational medium for others, for example through writing stories or books. Participant 2 develops a clearer future orientation related to family, education, and career in the health field, as well as motivation to become a successful and beneficial person for the family. Participant 3 focused on life goals on self, children, and

family happiness, as well as the desire to protect others from similar experiences. Overall, trauma not only changes psychological states, but also reshapes participants' life, values, and existential goals to be more adaptive and meaningful.

The research findings indicate that the process of meaning-making among adult survivors of Online Child Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (OCSEA) is influenced by various interacting factors, both internal and external. In this study, these factors include the need for affection and interpersonal relationships, exposure to education and information regarding sexual violence, healthier interpersonal experiences, and a future-oriented outlook. These findings suggest that the process of making sense of traumatic experiences does not occur spontaneously, but is influenced by developmental context, relational experiences, cognitive readiness, and an individual's psychosocial resources in understanding their traumatic experiences. In the meaning-making model, Park (2010) explains that traumatic experiences give rise to a meaning discrepancy between global meaning, comprising beliefs, life goals, and individual values and the appraised meaning of the traumatic experience, thereby prompting the individual to undertake various meaning-making efforts to reduce psychological distress and rebuild a sense of coherence in life.

One factor that appears to influence the process of meaning-making in this study is the need for affection and the dynamics of interpersonal relationships. For Participant 2, the need for affection and a father figure was a dominant factor influencing how the participant understood and maintained the relationship with the perpetrator. Although the participant had an initial awareness that certain behaviours were indicative of sexual abuse, they remained in the relationship because it was perceived as a source of emotional attention that had previously felt unmet. For Participant 1, the continuation of the relationship was more influenced by concerns regarding the dissemination of sexual content, consequently, the participant's focus at that time was more on efforts to maintain the relationship rather than on understanding the experience as a form of sexual violence. These findings suggest that emotional needs and interpersonal attachment can influence how victims interpret their OCSEA experiences and delay the reinterpretation of these experiences as a form of victimisation. This aligns with the research by Vrisaba et al., which indicates that victims of sexual violence may remain in relationships due to psychological manipulation, interpersonal control, and distraction by positive emotions such as feeling cared for and accepted.

Similar findings are also described by Whittle et al. (2013), who show that victims of online grooming often experience emotional ambivalence, attachment to the perpetrator, and difficulty extricating themselves from the relationship due to gradual manipulation. In the context of technology-mediated relationships, recent research also indicates that technology-mediated sexual violence frequently occurs within relationships characterised by emotional closeness and interpersonal control dynamics, meaning victims tend to struggle to recognise abusive behaviour as a form of sexual violence (Zhang & Mo, 2025)

In addition to the need for emotional support, exposure to education and information regarding sexual violence also played a significant role in the process of making sense of OCSEA experiences. For Participant 3, the understanding of the experience as a form of sexual abuse developed after receiving education through school and seminars on sexual violence. For Participant 2, a reinterpretation of the experience emerged when the participant began to link their personal experience with cases of sexual violence featured on social media. Meanwhile, for Participant 1, awareness developed through experiences of healthier romantic relationships, enabling the participant to compare previous relationship patterns with more adaptive ones. These findings suggest that new information, education, and interpersonal experiences can help victims build a more realistic understanding of traumatic experiences that were previously normalised. Research by Vrisaba et al. indicates that education, social validation, and environmental support act as recovery factors that help victims reduce tendencies towards self-blame and develop more adaptive interpretations of experiences of sexual violence. From Park's (2010) perspective, this process can be understood as a form of meaning revision through the adjustment of a belief system that no longer aligns with the traumatic experience.

Another factor influencing the process of meaning-making is the development of healthier interpersonal experiences following the OCSEA experience. For Participant 1, the experience of being in a healthier romantic relationship served as a framework for evaluating past experiences. A relationship free

from sexual pressure or interpersonal control helped the participant understand that their previous experiences did not reflect a healthy relationship. For Participant 2, the evaluation of the relationship developed when the relationship began to be perceived as hindering educational goals and future aspirations due to restrictions imposed by the partner. These findings suggest that more adaptive interpersonal experiences can serve as a point of comparison in reinterpreting previous traumatic experiences. In the context of interpersonal trauma, safe relational experiences are known to help individuals revise their basic assumptions about social relationships that were previously shaken by victimisation (Janoff-Bulman, 1992).

In addition to interpersonal factors, future orientation also appeared to influence the process of meaning-making among the three participants. For Participant 2, the motivation to achieve aspirations and improve their life was a key factor in the decision to break free from a relationship perceived as limiting personal development. For Participant 1, traumatic experiences began to be interpreted as a means of education through the desire to document life experiences in order to raise public awareness of online sexual harassment. Meanwhile, in Participant 3, a drive developed to help others and to become a protective figure for individuals vulnerable to similar experiences. These findings suggest that a future-oriented perspective helps participants shift their focus from suffering towards the formation of new, more meaningful life goals. From the perspective of meaning reconstruction, Neimeyer (2016) explains that post-traumatic recovery occurs when individuals are able to integrate traumatic experiences into a new, more coherent life narrative. These findings are also consistent with the concept of post-traumatic growth, which explains that traumatic experiences can foster the development of personal strengths, changes in life priorities, and new, more adaptive life goals (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004).

Overall, the findings of this study indicate that the process of meaning-making among adult survivors of OCSEA is influenced by a combination of emotional, interpersonal, cognitive and contextual factors. The need for affection, experiences of interpersonal relationships, exposure to education regarding sexual violence, experiences of healthier relationships, and a future-oriented outlook are key factors influencing how participants understand, evaluate, and reinterpret the OCSEA experiences they endured during childhood or adolescence. These findings suggest that the process of meaning-making is influenced not only by the characteristics of the trauma itself, but also by the psychosocial resources available throughout an individual's development and the social context surrounding their recovery process.

IV. CONCLUSION

This study shows that the dynamics of meaning-making among adult survivors of Online Child Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (OCSEA) are complex, dynamic and non-linear. The process of meaning-making is influenced by various factors, such as the need for affection, interpersonal relationships, reflective experiences, exposure to education regarding sexual violence, environmental support, and the participants future orientation. In this process, all three participants experienced a discrepancy between their core beliefs (global meaning) and the traumatic experiences they had endured, thereby driving the engagement in the meaning-making process through both automatic and deliberate reflection, cognitive and emotional processing, and the search for understanding and meaning regarding their OCSEA experiences. However, these dynamics did not unfold uniformly across all participants. Ultimately, the meaning-making process resulted in 'meaning made' in the form of a shift in self-perception towards greater strength and independence, a change in the way interpersonal relationships are viewed to become more selective and vigilant, increased awareness of digital security, and the formation of new life goals such as a desire to help others, build healthier relationships, and lead a more meaningful life.

V. ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The authors wish to express their deepest gratitude to everyone who contributed to the completion of this study, entitled "Dynamics of Meaning-Making among Adult Survivors of Online Child Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (OCSEA)." Our profound respect and utmost gratitude go to the participants who courageously shared their deeply personal and sensitive life experiences. Their openness, resilience, and willingness to reflect on their past have provided invaluable insights into the understanding of digital trauma

and the journey toward authentic growth. We also extend our sincere appreciation to the faculty members, colleagues, and institutions who provided academic support, ethical guidance, and resources throughout the process of conducting this research and preparing this manuscript. Finally, we thank our families and peers for their continuous encouragement and unwavering support.

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