

CHILD PROTECTION WATCH

Quarterly Media Analysis of Violence Against Children in Sri Lanka
January - March 2026

We are pleased to present *Child Protection Watch*, now published as a quarterly newsletter. This shift from monthly updates enables deeper analysis of trends, patterns, and emerging risks related to violence against children in Sri Lanka.

Drawing on systematic media monitoring, this edition consolidates data over a longer period to generate clearer insights that support prevention, strengthen responses, and inform evidence-based decision-making.



Following the devastating floods caused by Cyclone Ditwah, children in the Kolonnawa Divisional Secretariat Division experienced severe disruption to their education and well-being.

Through our emergency response, nearly 6,000 children received essential school materials and psychosocial support, enabling them to return to learning with dignity and stability. The image reflects not only recovery, but resilience, children regaining continuity and hope.

Key Findings

- February recorded the highest number of victims, largely due to multi-child incidents.
- Sexual abuse was the most reported form of violence, followed by neglect.
- Adolescents (11–18) were the most affected, particularly in sexual abuse cases.
- Girls were more frequently affected, though many cases lacked gender data.
- Community settings recorded the highest incidents, followed by homes and schools.
- Most perpetrators were known to the child, including family members, teachers, and peers.
- Colombo and Kalutara reported the highest incidents, while Kandy recorded high victim counts due to a single major case.

Monthly Trend of Reported Incidents

January to March 2026



Between January and March 2026, a total of **105 incidents** were reported, affecting **224 children** across Sri Lanka. Monthly trends show fluctuations, with February recording the highest number of victims.

Type of Violence Reported in the Media

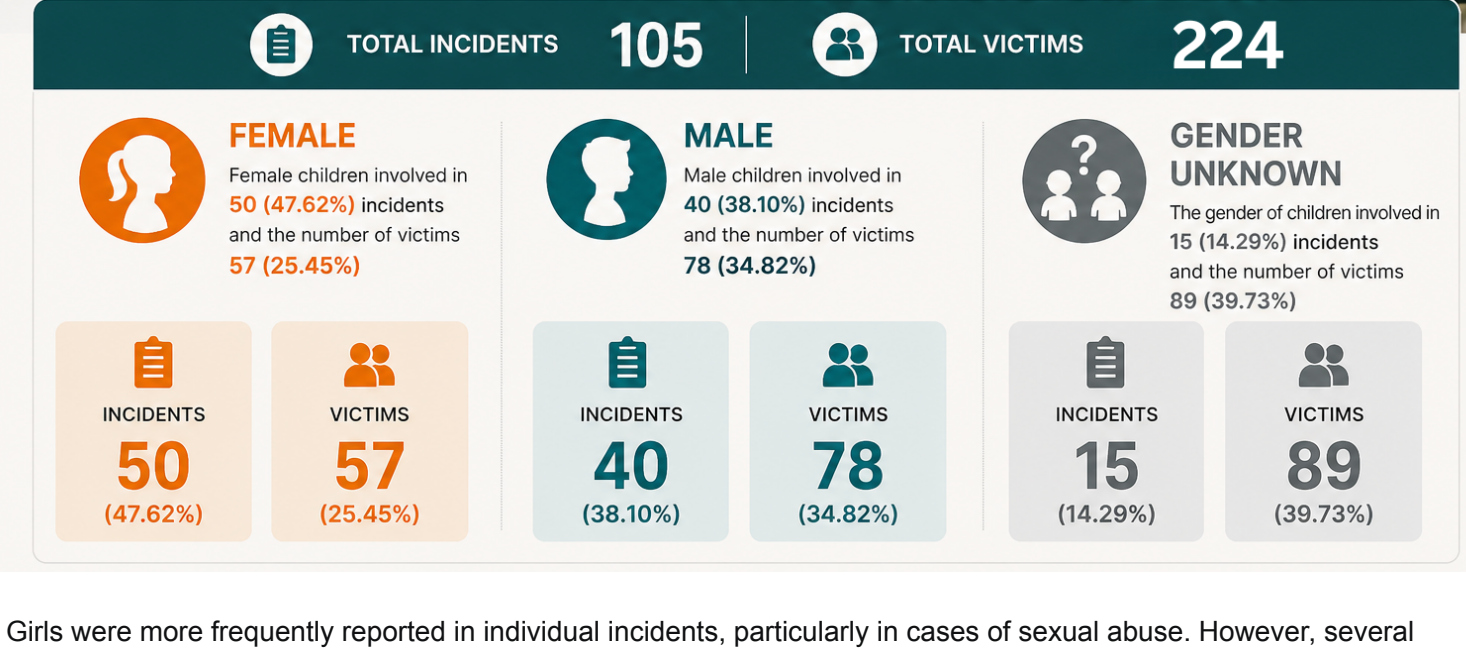
Incidents and Victims Reported (January – March 2026)

Classification of Violence	Incidents Count	Victims Count	Short Narration
Homicide	14	16	Mostly infants killed by parents; some accidental deaths due to negligence.
Sexual Abuse	34	71	Rape, sexual assault, molestation, trafficking; offenders included parents, teachers, clergy, law enforcement, and peers.
Neglect	23	65	Falls, drownings, electrocution, unsafe environments, or abandonment; frequent parental negligence.
Suicide	6	6	Largely teenage girls (ages 15–18); often linked to academic or emotional stress.
Physical Abuse	17	38	Severe assault, deliberate injury, domestic violence, corporal punishment at schools.
Emotional Abuse	3	3	School-related bullying, intimidation, and attempted kidnappings.
Drug Abuse	2	13	Drug dealers target schoolchildren with free samples and peer pressure, drawing them into addiction and distribution.
Missing	6	12	Missing children, abductions, drug exposure, AI-related exploitation.
TOTAL	105	224	Every child has the right to be safe, protected, and nurtured.

The analysis reveals that Sexual Abuse and Neglect are the most prevalent forms of violence reported, accounting for a significant portion of the total incidents. Physical Abuse also remains a serious concern.

Victim's Gender

Distribution of incidents and victims by gender of children



Girls were more frequently reported in individual incidents, particularly in cases of sexual abuse. However, several group incidents did not specify gender, resulting in a high proportion of "unspecified" victims. This highlights both gendered vulnerability and gaps in media reporting.

Age Distribution of Victims

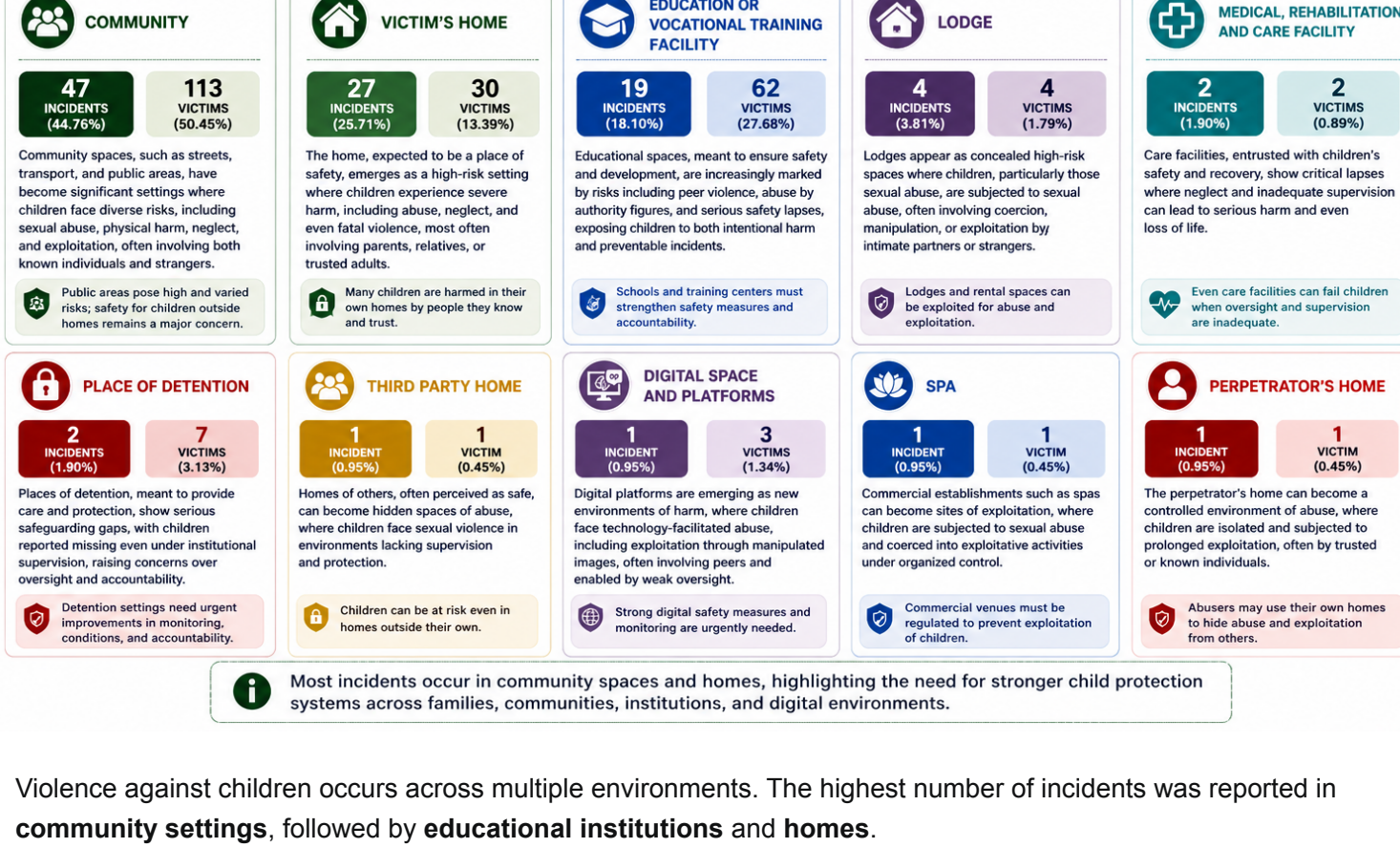
At the time of violence

Age Range	Incidents (Total 105)	Victims (Total 224)	Key Insight / Context
Below 1 year	5 (4.76%)	6 (2.68%)	High infant mortality due to abandonment or abuse.
1 to 5 years	11 (10.48%)	14 (6.25%)	Extreme vulnerability to neglect (drownings, electrocution, burns).
6 to 10 years	8 (7.62%)	8 (3.57%)	Physical/sexual abuse emerging in schools and neighborhoods.
11 to 14 years	28 (26.67%)	35 (15.63%)	Rapid rise in sexual and emotional abuse reports.
15 to 18 years	31 (29.52%)	34 (15.18%)	Highest at-risk group; abductions, sexual assaults, suicides, and missing children.
Unspecified	22 (20.95%)	127 (56.70%)	Missing demographic detail in some reports.
TOTAL	105	224	

Children aged 11–18 years appeared most frequently in reported incidents, especially in sexual abuse cases. However, many media reports did not specify age, which affected the accuracy of victim profiling.

Setting where Incidents Occurred

Incidents reported in the media (January – March 2026)

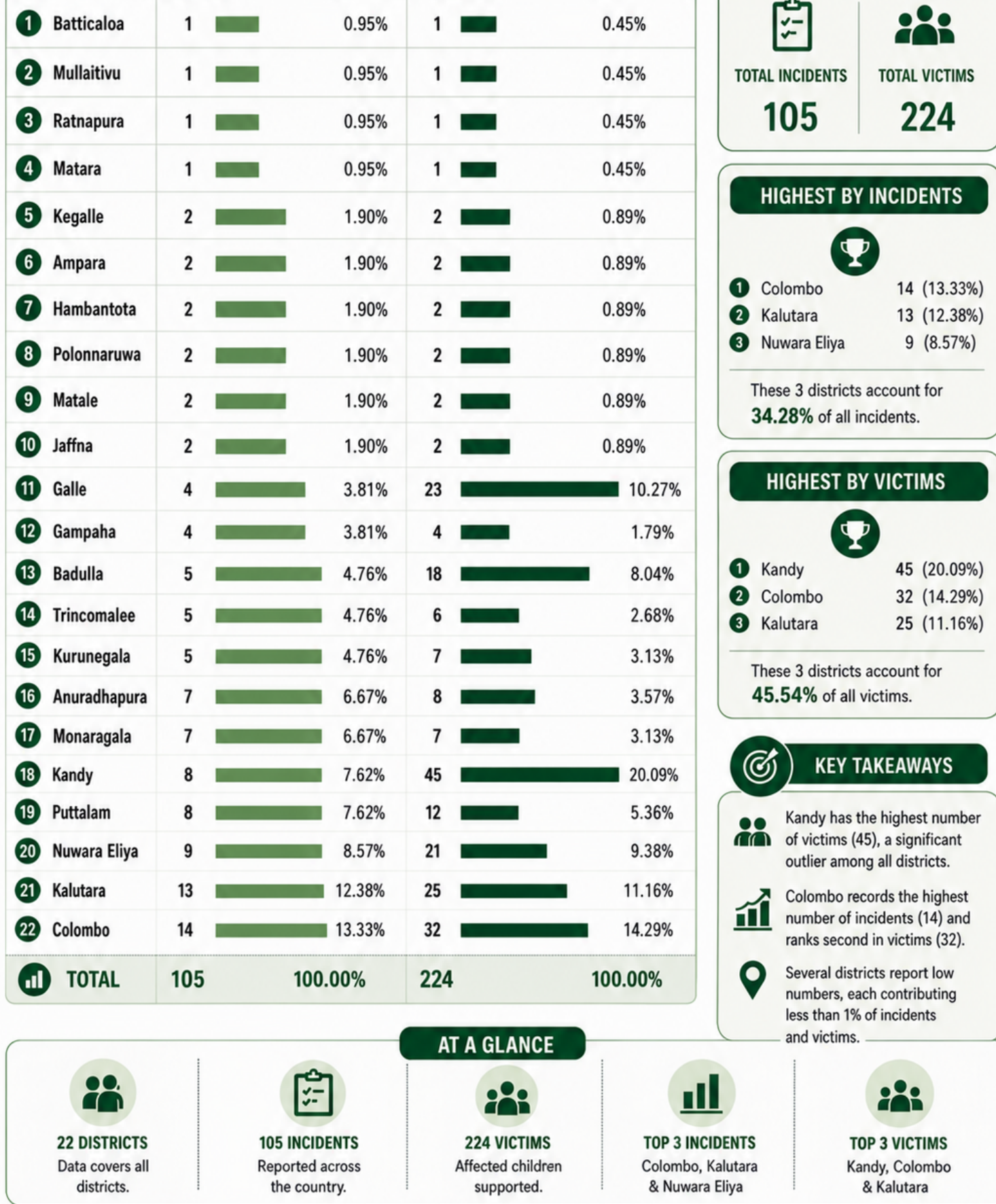


Violence against children occurs across multiple environments. The highest number of incidents was reported in community settings, followed by educational institutions and homes.

This distribution highlights the need for educational prevention across all social environments where children live, learn, and interact.

District-wise Child Protection Issues and Victims

Distribution of incidents and victims by District



Violence against children is a nationwide concern, with higher concentrations in certain districts. Colombo, Kalutara, and Kandy recorded the highest number of reported incidents during this period.

Emerging Issues and Risk Trends

Protecting children, strengthening systems, securing their future

- DIGITAL EXPLOITATION:** AI-based manipulation of minors' photos and online grooming (e.g., creation of deepfake content) shows a dangerous new trend requiring urgent digital safety laws.
 - DEEPFAKE RISK
 - ONLINE GROOMING
- EDUCATIONAL VULNERABILITIES:** Schools are repeatedly linked to physical harm and psychological trauma, including lab accidents, corporal punishment, and sexual abuse by teachers.
 - LAB ACCIDENTS
 - CORPORAL PUNISHMENT
 - SEXUAL ABUSE BY TEACHERS
- INFANT AND TODDLER NEGLECT:** Drowning, falls, and abandonment dominate under-five injuries, pointing to childcare negligence and unsafe home environments.
 - DROWNING
 - FALLS
 - ABANDONMENT
- ADOLESCENT SUICIDE AND INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE:** The rise in teen suicides and relationships with adults reflects underestimated psychosocial stress and sexual exploitation, especially among girls aged 15–18.
 - RISING TEEN SUICIDES
 - RELATIONSHIPS WITH ADULTS
 - PSYCHOSOCIAL STRESS
 - SEXUAL EXPLOITATION
 - GIRLS AGED 15-18 MOST VULNERABLE
- INSTITUTIONAL GAPS:** Despite ongoing legal proceedings, delays in justice (over 4,000 High Court cases pending) erode deterrence and slow victims' recovery.
 - PENDING CASES 4,000+ IN HIGH COURT
 - DELAYS IN JUSTICE
 - ERODES DETERRENCE
 - SLOWS VICTIMS' RECOVERY

Addressing these emerging risks requires stronger laws, faster justice, safer environments, and collective action—because every child matters.

Child protection risks are becoming more complex and interconnected:

- Digital exploitation is rising, including online grooming and AI-generated abuse content.
- School-related risks persist, including corporal punishment, accidents, and abuse by authority figures.
- Neglect among young children remains high, often linked to unsafe environments and inadequate supervision.
- Adolescent vulnerability is increasing, including suicide and exploitative relationships, particularly among girls.
- Justice system delays continue to weaken deterrence and slow recovery for victims.

These trends underscore the need for stronger laws, safer environments, and more responsive protection systems.

Action by Police

(Based on media-reported law enforcement responses) January to March 2026

OVERALL COVERAGE

- 105 Total incidents analysed
- 88 Cases with clearly reported police action
- 17 Cases with no / unclear police action reported
- 84% Police action reported
- 16% No / unclear information

Around 84% of cases indicate some form of police intervention, while 16% lack clear information.

BREAKDOWN OF POLICE ACTIONS

Type of Police Action	Incidents	% of Total
Arrest made	62	59%
Produced before court / remanded	41	39%
Ongoing investigations	28	27%
Released on bail	12	11%
Complaint recorded / inquiry initiated (no arrest yet)	9	9%
No clear action reported	17	16%

KEY PATTERNS & INSIGHTS

- MAJORITY OF CASES INVOLVE ARRESTS:** 62 out of 105 incidents (59%) reported arrests.
 - Interpretation: Indicates a strong immediate response, particularly in serious cases such as:
 - Sexual abuse
 - Physical violence
 - Fatal incidents
- SIGNIFICANT NUMBER PROCEEDED TO COURT:** 41 cases (39%) involved suspects being:
 - Produced before court
 - Remanded in custody
 Interpretation: Shows that a substantial portion of cases move beyond initial arrest into the judicial process.
- INVESTIGATIONS ONGOING IN OVER A QUARTER OF CASES:** 28 cases (27%) reported ongoing investigations.
 - Interpretation: Reflects:
 - Evidence collection processes
 - Delays in finalising cases
 - Complexity of certain incidents
- BAIL GRANTED IN A NOTABLE NUMBER OF CASES:** 12 cases (11%) involved suspects being released on bail.
 - Implication: Raises concerns regarding:
 - Victim safety
 - Need for protective measures during legal proceedings
- LIMITED IMMEDIATE ACTION IN SOME CASES:** 9 cases (9%) reported no complaints or inquiries without arrest.
 - Interpretation: May indicate:
 - Insufficient evidence at early stage
 - Complexity of cases
 - Delays in response
- INFORMATION GAPS REMAIN SIGNIFICANT:** 17 cases (16%) had no clear police action reported.
 - Implications:
 - Weak visibility of law enforcement response
 - Media reporting limitations
 - Challenges in tracking accountability

CRITICAL ANALYTICAL INSIGHT

- STRONG INITIAL ACTION:** Arrests are reported in the majority of cases.
- MODERATE PROGRESS INTO COURTS:** Many cases move into the judicial process.
- WEAK VISIBILITY OF FINAL OUTCOMES:** Convictions, case closures and long-term results remain largely unreported.

Every child has the right to be safe, protected, and nurtured. Stronger action. Better follow-through. Safer children.

Police action was reported in approximately 84% of cases, indicating a generally strong immediate response.

Arrests were the most common intervention, and many cases progressed to court, suggesting some level of legal follow-up. However, a significant number of cases remain under investigation or result in bail.

In addition, gaps in reporting (16% of cases) limit full visibility. While initial response appears robust, the consistency and clarity of case outcomes remain unclear.