

Compendium of Articles

**Research Findings on Child Abuse  
Images and Sexual Exploitation of  
Children Online**



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# Research Findings on Child Abuse Images and Sexual Exploitation of Children Online

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# Acronyms

CRC:	Convention on the Rights of the Child
CSEC:	Commercial Sexual Exploitation Of Children
CSR:	Corporate Social Responsibility
CST:	Child-Sex tourism
ECPAT:	End Child Prostitution, Child Pornography and Trafficking of Children for Sexual Purposes
ICT:	Information and communication technologies
NGOs:	Non-governmental organisations
OPSC:	Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography

# Preface

Internet technology is perhaps the greatest facilitator humankind has created to date. The technology has facilitated connections that transcend most of the traditional boundaries to community building: geography, culture, time, and jurisdictional boundaries. While the benefits of these connections are profound and almost limitless, the IT revolution is not without unintended adverse consequences. Internet technology – which of course is by itself morally neutral – has also facilitated the creation of criminal communities that transcend all of the same traditional limitations to community building. The result is the proliferation of criminal communities of unprecedented scope, size and durability. The troubling implications for those vulnerable to victimization are obvious.

How are we to respond to this new challenge? The reports in this journal offer new research findings, insights and analysis, reveal gaps and make recommendations aimed at protecting children from forms of sexual exploitation through the Internet and promoting their physical and psychological recovery and social reintegration.

The research findings presented in this journal illustrate that unlike offline child molestation, a considerable

portion of the victims of internet-related sexual crimes are children under 12 years of age, and that these victims are more likely to have post-traumatic stress disorders. Other youth groups that are especially vulnerable to Internet-related sexual exploitation are children who question their sexual orientation and gender identity, who turn to the internet to contact other lesbian, gay bisexual and transgender adolescents.

Other research findings highlight how little is known about how child victims of online sexual abuse cope. There is a need to offer the victimised children and their families support or treatment that they find interesting and useful. There is also a need for therapists to learn more about how to handle such cases - what the abuse can look like, the children's reactions and what kind of support is relevant.

Another paper finds that prevention messages emphasizing parental control and the dangers of divulging personal information may not be enough to prevent online sexual exploitation. Finding developmentally appropriate prevention strategies that target youth directly and acknowledge normal adolescent interests in romance and sex are needed. These should provide younger adolescents with

awareness and avoidance skills, while educating older youth about the pitfalls of sexual relationships with adults and their criminal nature.

A crucial area examined is the psychological characteristics of Internet offenders, and the linkages between viewing indecent images of children and contact sexual abuse. Lastly, this journal offers recommendations on how law enforcement must operate and respond to internet child sexual exploitation.

In the Convention on the Rights of the Child, Articles 34 and 39, member States have undertaken to both protect children from all forms of sexual exploitation, including the exploitative use of children in pornographic materials, and to promote their physical and psychological recovery and social reintegration. There is a worldwide gap between the declaration expressed in these Articles and reality. ECPAT International hopes that by making these research findings available, we will help support you in promoting the protection of children's rights online.

# RESEARCH FINDINGS IN THE UNITED STATES ABOUT SEXUAL EXPLOITATION VIA VIRTUAL INTERACTIONS

By Janis Wolak

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In the United States, there has been much publicity about online “predators” who prey on naive children using trickery and violence. However, this stereotype of online sex offenders is largely inaccurate. Internet sex crimes involving adults and juveniles more often fit a model of statutory rape – adult offenders who meet, develop relationships with and openly seduce underage teenagers – than a model of forcible sexual assault or pedophilic child molesting. This is a serious problem, but one that requires different approaches from prevention messages emphasising parental control and the dangers of divulging personal information.

Developmentally appropriate prevention strategies that target youth directly and acknowledge normal adolescent interests in romance and sex are needed. These should provide younger adolescents with awareness and avoidance skills, while educating older youth about the pitfalls of sexual relationships with adults and their criminal nature.

Particular attention should be paid to higher risk youth, including those with histories of sexual abuse, sexual orientation concerns and patterns of online and offline

risk taking. Mental health practitioners and other practitioners need information about the dynamics of this problem and the characteristics of victims and offenders because they are likely to encounter related issues in a variety of contexts.

The key points and recommendations below are based on research relating to Internet-initiated sex crimes that was conducted at the Crimes against Children Research Center (CCRC) at the University of New Hampshire. The CCRC research includes the first and second Youth Internet Safety Surveys, telephone interviews with national samples of youth Internet users, ages 10 to 17, conducted in 2000 and 2005. It also includes the first National Juvenile Online Victimization Study, research examining the characteristics of Internet-initiated sex crimes by interviewing law enforcement investigators.

## KEY POINTS

- Most Internet-initiated sex crimes involve adult men who use the Internet to meet and seduce underage adolescents into sexual encounters.

- Most offenders are open about being older adults who are interested in sex. Few offenders (about 5%) use violence to perpetrate their crimes. Offenders are commonly charged with nonforcible sex crimes against underage youth, such as statutory rape.
- By law, underage youth cannot consent to sexual activity with adults. Younger adolescents have little experience with intimate relationships, often do not know how to negotiate with older partners about sexual activity, and have high rates of coerced intercourse. In the US, the age of consent is 16 in most states.
- Statutory rape is a relatively prevalent crime. In 2000, about 25% of the sex crimes committed against minors and reported to police involved statutory rape. In crimes that ended in arrest, offenders may have met victims online in about 7% of all statutory rape cases in 2000.
- Young adolescents are the primary targets of sex offenders who use the Internet to meet victims. Describing young teenagers as vulnerable because they are innocent about sex does not capture the nature of the sexual issues that get youth into trouble online. The reality of adolescent sexual development includes growing sexual curiosity, knowledge, and experience as youth make the transition from childhood to adulthood.
- Certain online behaviours make youth vulnerable to seduction by online sex offenders. These include sending personal information to unknown people and talking to unknown people about sex. These interactive behaviours appear to carry more risk than posting personal information or maintaining social networking sites. Further, youth who engage in a high number of different risky online behaviours (for example, having unknown people on a buddy list, seeking pornography online, using the Internet to harass others) were also more at risk.
- Some youth are more vulnerable than others. Certain characteristics – histories of physical or sexual abuse, delinquency, depression, conflict with parents – appear to increase risk. Boys who are gay or questioning their sexual orientation are another population at risk.
- Online sex offenders are generally not pedophiles and are rarely violent. Pedophiles target prepubescent children, while almost all victims in Internet-initiated cases are adolescents. About 5% of cases involve violence, usually rape or attempted rape.
- A considerable number of online child molesters also possess child pornography, and child pornography production is an important element in many cases, including situations where offenders solicit victims to produce child pornography images of themselves.

- While there are concerns that aspects of the Internet may trigger sexual offending or make youth more accessible to sex offenders, in the US, sex crimes against youth have not increased. In fact, sexual abuse has decreased considerably since the early 1990s. However, we may see increases in the future and the situation should be carefully monitored.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- Avoid descriptions of the problem that characterise victims as young children or emphasise violence and deception. Portraying victims as young children does not sensitise the public, parents or adolescents to the nature of Internet-initiated sex crimes. Similarly, characterising these crimes as violent makes it hard for the public and professionals to recognise nonforcible crimes such as statutory rape, and it may prevent victims from reporting crimes that do not conform to violent stereotypes. Although it would be a mistake to say that these crimes never involve violence or deception, the public already may be so aware of those possibilities that it is essential to provide countervailing information.
- Be clear about why sex with underage adolescents is wrong. Messages should reinforce norms and counteract media that present sexualised images of youth. Offenders and potential offenders need to hear a clear message that nonforcible sex with underage adolescents violates the social responsibility adults have toward youth for objective mentoring and custodianship.
- Focus prevention efforts more on adolescents and less on parents. The adolescents who tend to be the victims of Internet-initiated sex crimes may not themselves be very receptive to the advice and supervision of parents. Prevention strategies should be targeted more directly at adolescents themselves, using media and authorities, including other youth, who have their confidence. Another important audience for these messages is peers and other “bystanders”.
- Focus prevention frankly on concerns relevant to adolescents, including autonomy, romance and sex. Youth need candid, direct discussions about seduction and how some adults deliberately evoke and then exploit the compelling feelings that sexual arousal can induce. This information should include reassurances that it is normal to have strong sexual feelings, but wrong for adults to provoke or exploit these feelings.
- Prevention should be developmentally appropriate and an aspect of broader programmes that focus on healthy sexual development and avoiding victimisation. With younger adolescents, programmes might emphasise types of Internet use and websites, risky situations youth may encounter online and practicing refusal and resistance techniques. Older adolescents could use information about age of consent laws, the problems of relationships with older partners, the dangers of transmitting sexual pictures, and online grooming tactics used by sexual offenders.

- Focus prevention more on interactive aspects of Internet use and less on posting personal information. Millions of youth use social networking sites safely, and we have not found evidence that these sites are more risky than other popular online venues. Prevention messages should focus on online interactions because Internet-initiated sex crimes come about through direct communications between offenders and victims. Youth should be encouraged to be wary about talking online with unknown people about sex and to report inappropriate sexual overtures to website and law enforcement authorities.
- Educate youth about criminal behaviour and child pornography. An adult using the Internet to make sexual advances to minors is a crime in most US jurisdictions. Prevention messages also need to publicise the prevalence and risks of adults asking youth to take sexually explicit pictures of themselves. We need to extend this education to parents and clinicians as well, so they understand the unsuspected and risky uses that web and digital cameras may be put to and the potential magnitude of this problem. Clinicians who work with youth who have been sexually abused and assaulted should be alert to the possibilities that illegal sexual images of victims may have been produced.
- Develop targeted prevention approaches for the most at-risk youth populations. Most current prevention programmes are developed for the general

population of youth Internet users, but the most at-risk youth may be hard to reach with these generic materials. Since mental health professionals may have more opportunities for interaction with at-risk youth, we suggest that mental health organisations, with youth input, work to develop prevention materials that can be used by practitioners with such populations, individually or in small groups.

- Assess for a pattern of risky online behaviour. While many individual Internet behaviours are not associated with higher rates of receiving aggressive sexual solicitations, there is increased risk associated with engaging in a pattern of online risk-taking. The more risk behaviours a youth engages in, the higher the risk. The least prevalent behaviours may pose the most concern.
  - Posting personal information online, 56% of youth Internet users
  - Interacting online with unknown people, 43%
  - Having unknown people on a buddy list, 35%
  - Using the Internet to make rude and nasty comments to others, 28%
  - Sending personal information to unknown people met online, 26%
  - Downloading images from file-sharing programs, 15%
  - Visiting x-rated websites on purpose, 13%
  - Using the Internet to embarrass or harass people youth are mad at, 9%
  - Talking online to unknown people about sex, 5%

# REACHING OUT AND ASSISTING CHILD VICTIMS OF ONLINE SEXUAL ABUSE: PROBLEMATIC AREAS AND GAPS

by Carl Göran Svedin

## SPECIFIC PRESENTATION OF PROBLEMATIC AREAS AND GAPS

It seems that the risk for being exposed to Internet-related sexual victimisation is not the same for all young persons. As a considerable portion of the victims of Internet-related sexual victimisation are in early and mid-adolescence, the age profile is much more restricted than that for conventional offline child molestation, which includes a large proportion of victims younger than age 12 (Wolak, Finkelhor, Mitchell, Ybarra, 2008). Youths with a history of sexual or physical abuse may be particularly vulnerable, as prior abuse may trigger risky sexual behaviour offline and online (Wolak, Finkelhor, Mitchell & Ybarra, 2008). Many of those who have received sexual suggestions from an adult online or offline seem to have general risk behaviour, problems in their family or at school and experiences of bullying, robbery and violence (Brottsförebyggande rådet, 2007).

Professionals who have worked with youth receiving mental health services for an Internet-related abuse

problem reported that the young persons also presented with a variety of DSV-IV diagnoses and conventional mental health issues, both internalising and externalising problems (Wells, & Mitchell, 2007). It may be that either the Internet problem or the comorbid conventional mental health issue is pre-existing, or they may both have a common etiology. Youth victims of online sexual exploitation were more likely to suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder than youth with other Internet-related problems; they were also more likely to run away from home or act out sexually and more often, some other authority besides the clinician, such as a law enforcement official or child protective services, was involved (Wells, & Mitchell, 2007). In summary, youth who are facing challenges in their daily lives may also be encountering problems online (Wells & Mitchell, 2007).

Ybarra, Mitchell, Finkelhor and Wolak (2007) investigated whether online risky behaviours increase the risk for online interpersonal victimisation (unwanted sexual solicitation or harassment). The most often reported online risky behaviour was posting personal

information (56%), followed by meeting someone online (43%), having people on a “buddy list” known only online (35%), making a rude or nasty comment (28%), sending personal information (26%), downloading images from file-sharing programs (15%), visiting an X-rated website intentionally (13%), harassing or embarrassing someone (9%) and talking about sex with someone known only online (5%). Engaging in four types of risky online behaviours seemed to represent a tipping point of increased risk for online interpersonal victimisation. Further adjustment for psychosocial and behavioural problems attenuated, but failed to explain the observed relationship between online behaviour and online interpersonal victimisation.

Swedish mental health professionals who meet young persons exposed to Internet-related sexual abuse are especially concerned about those who respond to sexual suggestions by taking part in sexual activities online or arrange personal meetings for sexual purposes offline (Nyman, 2006). Child and adolescent mental health professionals have an important task in addressing these issues as many at-risk youth may be hard to reach through prevention programmes created for the general population of Internet users (Wolak, Finkelhor, Mitchell, & Ybarra, 2008). Research and clinical practice show that children exploited through sexually abusive images are less prone to disclose or seek help after a disclosure. They tend to keep their experiences to themselves and are at risk of developing various problems later in their childhood or as adults.

In Articles 34 and 39 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, Member States have undertaken to both protect children from all forms of sexual exploitation, including the exploitative use of children in pornographic performances and materials, to promote physical and psychological recovery and social reintegration of sexual exploited children.

There is still a worldwide gap between the declaration expressed in these Articles and reality. The declaration could in most countries at best be described as an ambition.

### **Identification of priorities in dealing with the issues**

There is an urgent need to develop and provide different forms of rehabilitation for sexual exploited children – in this case exploited through abusive images on the Internet. Rehabilitation should be offered to all children exploited through sexually abusive images and should be sensitive to cultural, ethnic, gender-related and other variables.

### **Recommended action**

- As a first step, first line professionals (teachers, nurses, social workers) need to ask questions about Internet usage and possible problematic Internet experiences in their meetings with children and adolescents.

- Second, second line professionals (therapists and others) need to develop appropriate interventions (education, individual and/or group treatment) for those who are in need of it.
- Third, consequently this means that national programmes for all forms of sexually abused children should be developed, including children abused through the internet.
- Fourth, better knowledge needs to be developed in order to better understand the special difficulties that children abused through the Internet could encounter (including identification and disclosure) and if special profiles of treatment have to be developed for this group.
- Fifth, training and education for both first and second line professionals is needed so that they can provide appropriate support to those who need it.

# THE LAW ENFORCEMENT RESPONSE TO INTERNET CHILD SEXUAL EXPLOITATION: FOUR DIMENSIONAL OPERATIONAL INTEGRATION

by David Butt

Internet technology is perhaps the greatest facilitator that humankind has created to date. The technology has facilitated the creation of organic human communities that transcend most of the traditional boundaries to community building: geography, culture, time, and jurisdictional boundaries. While the benefits of transcendent community building are profound and almost limitless, the IT revolution is not of course without unintended adverse consequences. Internet technology – which of course is by itself morally neutral – has also facilitated the creation of criminal communities that transcend all of the same traditional limitations to community building. The result is the proliferation of criminal communities of unprecedented scope, size and durability. The troubling implications for those vulnerable to victimisation are obvious.

How are we to respond to what I will call this transcendent technologically enabled challenge? This brief concept note will discuss the operational dimensions of the response within law enforcement, using IT-facilitated child sexual exploitation as the focus. It is simplified as this paper must be short, and not out of any desire to minimise the importance of other modes of response, such as law reform, education and awareness,

prevention, engagement of civil society, etc.

If law enforcement is to respond effectively to the challenge of transcendent, technologically enabled criminal activity, it must achieve what I call four dimensional operational integration. Simply put, the days when a local, regional or national police service could operate in isolation, concerned only with criminal activity within its own jurisdictional boundaries, are long gone. Effective operational relationships must exist in four different dimensions, and those relationships must be operationally functional day-to-day, or even hour-to-hour. Such are the demands of responding successfully to the realities of Internet technology-enabled criminal activity.

What then are the four dimensions within which law enforcement must operate in an integrated way?

## NATIONAL OPERATIONAL INTEGRATION

The first is national integration. Many nation states are legally or constitutionally sub-divided into smaller regions or local municipalities. The natural consequence is that there are, within many nation states, jurisdictional

enclaves, each with their own unique laws and practices around policing. Here we encounter the first serious disconnect between policing capacity and criminal empowerment in an IT era. While police services must respect local limitations on their policing activities, IT enabled criminals do not. The man trading in images of child abuse cares not whether he is trading with another person mere kilometres away, or in the next province, state or canton. Crimes like these have local dimensions: the children being exploited are always local to somewhere, and therefore the imperative for a local police response remains strong. However, crimes like these have multi-jurisdictional aspects as well, and therefore local police services must be able to liaise effectively day-to-day with their counterparts across the nation, wherever the investigative trail may lead. Because when it comes to Internet child exploitation investigations, there is at least one reliable assumption: the investigative trail will almost always lead beyond the jurisdictional boundaries of the police service initiating the investigation.

National operational integration must be both vertical and horizontal. By vertical operational integration I mean that local police services must have effective day-to-day operational relationships with their counterparts ascending up the national hierarchy through larger regional police services, to national police services. Vertical operational integration is important for a variety of reasons. Effectiveness of evidence gathering is one, but among the many others are communication and coordination needs, record keeping, intelligence

gathering, and adherence to what are often multi-layered legal requirements.

Horizontal operational integration is equally important. Investigations are inevitably successful because local investigators, with an intimate understanding of the local situation, and a plethora of local contacts, are able to utilise that investigative capital to solve a case. When the case is multi-jurisdictional, direct contact and cooperation among investigators on the ground and attuned to the local dynamics in each jurisdiction likewise usually presents the best prospect for investigative success. Therefore, it is important that local investigators respect the need for vertical integration, but at the same time this respect cannot evolve into a rigid supposition that investigative communication and cooperation must be solely vertical. Those on the investigative front lines in each jurisdiction need to be in touch with each other directly, and often need to work with each other closely.

## **INTERNATIONAL VERTICAL OPERATIONAL INTEGRATION**

As mentioned above the Internet child abuse image trader is indifferent as to whether he is trading with someone locally or in a different part of his home country. He is equally indifferent as to whether his trading partner is in the same country, or continents away. Therefore, from the perspective of investigative efficacy, the need for effective operational integration is no less compelling internationally than it is

nationally. While perhaps intuitively obvious to state, effective international operational integration is much more difficult to achieve than national operational coordination because there is no national government to take the lead in coordinating and legislating as necessary to achieve this end.

Typically, then, international vertical coordination follows established patterns of international relations, in that it is a national police service, constitutionally or legislatively empowered to engage internationally, that takes the lead in seeking and administering international operational integration. We see this pattern emerging with the Virtual Global Task Force, and it is a crucial component of an effective response to transcendent technologically enabled criminal activity. The benefits of international vertical integration mirror, albeit on an international plane, the benefits discussed above of national vertical integration.

## **INTERNATIONAL HORIZONTAL OPERATIONAL INTEGRATION**

International horizontal integration is no less important than national horizontal integration because the two are essentially the same thing viewed from an investigator's perspective. If the subject of a local investigation is extending his criminal tentacles outside the jurisdiction, the evidentiary trail must be followed diligently. And whether this leads to another jurisdiction inside or outside the investigator's home country is essentially irrelevant. The investigative team must follow the

evidentiary trail wherever it leads, and when it leads outside the investigator's field of local knowledge, he or she will need the best possible source of local knowledge and insight elsewhere to pick up the trail. And the best possible source is often the local investigator in the jurisdiction where the trail leads. Further, Internet crime often unfolds in real time. The local investigator needs to be able to have immediate and reliable day-to-day contact with counterparts around the world in order to respond quickly.

Again, it is simple to state the case for international horizontal integration. It is all about those with the best local knowledge pooling their expertise so that there is no place where an Internet child abuser can act with impunity. But there are significant challenges to achieving international horizontal integration, and I would like to mention three. The first is a legal obstacle. Often, local police services simply have no formal legal capacity to act internationally in the ways that would best serve the investigation on the ground. Often, such a capacity is reserved exclusively to the national police service, which may or may not have the local expertise, or even ownership of the local investigation necessary to ask the right questions and get things done in the best way.

Second, there are practical challenges associated with coordination, control, quality assurance, intelligence gathering and communication if local police services have an unrestricted capacity to formulate and carry out international investigative relationships.

Third, police service funding models can seriously impede the effectiveness of local police services investigating technologically enabled transcendent criminal activity. When local police services are funded locally, local funders often insist on priority being given to policing activity that is merely local in scope. And when the inevitable shortages in public funding loom large, the insistence on prioritising purely local operations typically increases in force.

Local funders are not acting irrationally when they insist that their money address purely local concerns, but such an approach fails to recognise that technologically enabled transcendent criminal activity is both local and inter-jurisdictional, and that local benefits are realised in the long term from having effective policing relationships developed and maintained through ongoing cooperation in multi-jurisdictional investigations. To put the matter in concrete terms, in today's investigation, the child you help rescue from Internet exploitation may not live in your home town. But in tomorrow's investigation she will.

These three challenges to international horizontal integration are significant and worthy of considered attention. But they are not at present insurmountable obstacles. Currently, we are experiencing the emergence of countless informal but effective horizontal relationships among front line Internet child exploitation investigators around the world. The efficacy of these informal horizontal relationships is demonstrated in successful investigative outcomes: the rescue of

children and the apprehension of offenders. Therefore, it is incumbent on those in positions of executive and legislative authority, in government and in policing, to address the three challenges discussed above so as to normalise and expand the international horizontal operational integration that is already taking place informally.

### **CROSS-SECTORAL OPERATIONAL INTEGRATION**

Perhaps more than any other field of policing, IT enabled child exploitation is a field where law enforcement isolationism is problematic. First, the very realm in which this form of child exploitation takes place is a realm which is for the most part a creation of the private sector, and more specifically the technology sector. Accordingly, it is essential that law enforcement have productive relationships, premised on mutual understanding with the IT sector because it is the IT sector that, in an ongoing way, creates the technological world in which law enforcement must operate. Modes of cooperation between the IT sector and law enforcement must be constructed along the following lines. Child rights must be an inviolable priority, but beyond that the independent operational imperatives of both law enforcement and the IT sector must be respected.

Second, law enforcement and the NGO sector must re-examine their relationships with a view to greater integration. Many NGOs share the broad objectives of law enforcement in the realm of IT facilitated child

sexual exploitation. Further, inside many nation states, models for cooperation among law enforcement agencies and NGOs already exist in a number of investigative spheres. Accordingly, from a principled perspective, there is no reason not to explore various modalities of cooperation.

Independence is a crux issue in any advancement of the relationship between law enforcement and NGOs. Many NGOs perform a valuable service in civil society as independent voices of criticism, holding law enforcement accountable and calling out for change that may be resisted from within law enforcement. And likewise law enforcement must be, and must be seen to be, immune to inappropriate influence by any sector of civil society. Nothing should be permitted to dilute the important social function of independence on the part of both law enforcement and NGOs. But at the same time, parties who hold even sharply divergent views on some issues can none the less work together productively on other issues. The objective of “operational integration” across sectors is clearly not to blur the important distinctions between each. Rather, the objective must be to carefully construct working relationships that yield mutual benefits without sacrificing independence.

Naturally, trust is a key issue from the perspective of law enforcement, the IT sector, and NGOs. Consequently, cooperative engagement can follow only when and if the requisite foundation of trust has been built. To identify trust as a significant issue, however, is not to dismiss the

prospect of enhanced cooperation. Rather, it is to point out an important road that is worth travelling.

Further, the NGO, IT, and law enforcement sectors must resist the temptation to perceive the others in simplistic, one-dimensional terms. Inside any community there are invariably a range of views that typically do not reveal themselves readily upon superficial observation by an outsider. Everyone has to set aside pejorative preconceptions, look a little closer, and work a little harder. It will often take more earnest and difficult, and perhaps sometimes private engagement to seek the common ground that can result in beneficial cooperative endeavours. Often, the effort that ends up in cooperative engagement begins with a mutual desire to “know the enemy”.

# CHILD ABUSE IMAGES AND SEXUAL EXPLOITATION OF CHILDREN ONLINE

by Linda Jonsson

BUP-Elefanten is a specialised unit in the Child and Adolescent Psychiatric Clinic at the University Hospital of Linköping, Sweden, that offers treatment for child and adolescent victims of sexual abuse and/or physical abuse. BUP-Elefanten also carries out research, develops treatment methods and provides lectures on related topics. With financial support from the World Childhood Foundation, a three-year project was established in 2006 with the aim to improve understanding about the ways and the reasons that children are sexually abused via new technologies, and in this way develop better methods of support and treatment for the victimised children. The project is called "The Online Project" and the first report entitled *Abused Online*, is available at the project's homepage ([www.lio.se/onlineprojektet](http://www.lio.se/onlineprojektet)).

The project's work agenda is focused on interviewing professionals who are in contact with victimised children as well as to interview children, and when needed, offer therapy to the victims or support to their therapists. The project targets children who are 0-18 years old and have been sexually abused via new technologies. This includes, for example, young children used by paedophiles who have documented the abuse as well as adolescents who publish their own sexually abusive

pictures, or children who get bullied sexually by other children. This concept paper describes the knowledge and clinical experiences from BUP-Elefanten and the specialised knowledge gained from the Online Project.

Very little is known about how child victims of online sexual abuse cope, what kind of support or treatment they are offered, and what kind of treatment they need/wish. Experience from the Online Project is based on a few cases that are not enough to draw conclusions from, however, the tendencies observed and two major gaps of knowledge faced during the project implementation are discussed in the following pages.

## **WHAT IS THE STATUS OF HEALTH OF CHILD VICTIMS OF ONLINE SEXUAL ABUSE AND WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS [OF ABUSE??]?**

International research shows that 70% of child victims of sexual abuse show symptoms. There is, as far as we know, no similar research on victims of online sexual abuse but we found it reasonable to believe that these figures are also applicable to child victims of online sexual abuse. Experience from the Online Project indicates that most often the victims of online sexual

abuse exhibit symptoms similar to those of child victims of offline sexual abuse, such as eating disorders, exhaustion, pseudo-maturity, aggression, depression, post-traumatic symptom disorder (PTSD), low self-esteem, shame, guilt and anxiety, among others. These symptoms can be present in isolation or as a combination of several symptoms; not all children show symptoms or express that they are not feeling well. Research conducted internationally and BUP-Elefanten's clinical experience shows that symptoms can appear later in life. Some of the children do not at first sight exhibit any tendencies of not feeling well, but rather try to show that they are in total control of their life and do not want any support. For an untrained eye it is easy to believe in the child's competent story and may therefore not offer any support. It was found that if the child fills in a psychological self report form, the results oftentimes show that the child suffers from flashbacks, nightmares or self harming actions. If the child is questioned about these results they often confirm them. These kinds of tests can be a good complement to the assessment.

It is believed that online risk behaviour or self destructive behaviour may be ways for a child to self-medicate in order to ease anxiety. Shame, guilt and feelings of anxiety are very common symptoms among child victims of online sexual abuse. Therapists describe that children often feel that the self-experienced shame towards their parents is a greater pain for them than the abuse itself. The child feels stupid and fooled and that they let their parents down since they believe that they themselves

are responsible for the abuse. When it comes to the existence of sexually abusive images, there are both children who are very occupied with them as well as children who do not think that the images matter to them at the moment. The extent to which the images will be disturbing to the child later on in life cannot be determined.

There is a lack of knowledge about the effects on children of sexual abuse through new technology. Documented knowledge and more organised clinical experience is needed to learn ways in which sexual abuse through new technology affects children's reactions and symptoms. The children we have met have been in great need for support and therapy, but sometimes we have not been able to offer adequate help.

## ADEQUATE SUPPORT AND THERAPY

In the Online Project, professionals, mostly therapists, were interviewed about what kind of support or treatment they offer a child victim of online sexual abuse. There was a wide range of variation in what the child was offered, if anything. The interviews and Project experiences from the clinic also showed that the children often are uninterested in getting help and they seldom stay in therapy. In some cases the family does not support therapy. To give two examples from Sweden, a man was sentenced in 2003, for having taken sexually abusive images of his own children and some friends of his daughter. Most of the pictures were posing pictures. When the abuse was revealed,

only one of the victims accepted therapy. The parents of the other victims did not think it was necessary, as the children were too young to understand what had happened. Some of the interview sessions in the Online Project included some of the children from this case, and found that today they are not doing well. A more recent Swedish case is the “Alexandra” case, where over 150 girls were made to send sexual images to a man saying he could offer model contracts. Sixty of the girls met with the man and agreed to get sexually abused for money. When interviewing the prosecutor in the case, it became clear that only some of the girls were offered therapeutic support. Most of the girls either were not offered support or did not want any support. Why?

Something also notable was that when interviewing therapists about the abuse the child had experienced some could not describe what had happened. Some therapists were afraid to interfere with the police investigation; others said that they did not believe that the trauma itself was important; instead they focused on the symptoms the children exhibited. Both of these can be true but more often there is a risk that the therapist is afraid and feels uncomfortable with any answer that the child could bring forward.

To conclude, two major problems or challenges were identified: Firstly, there is a need to offer the victimised children and their families support or treatment that they will find engaging and useful. Do the existing methods really attract this group of victims? Secondly, there is a need for therapists to learn more about how to handle

these cases. The therapists need to learn what the abuse can look like, what the children’s reactions mean and therefore, what type of support is relevant. Well known research indicates that children seldom speak about sexual abuse, and there are several reasons for this. Some of the children say that no one asked them and therefore they would not tell. Therapists and professionals must learn to ask relevant questions. In sexual abuse cases, there is also a need for specialised therapists to deal with particularly vulnerable children since these are children you do not meet every day, for example, in an ordinary child and adolescent psychiatric unit or in a social welfare office. There has been a lot of focus on the police work with identifying the children, which is well needed, but we also need to take care of the victims in an adequate way when the abuse is revealed and the predator prosecuted. We need to support the child all the way through the trial but also afterwards. These abused and vulnerable children need special care and treatment during a long period of time and with continuity.

It is unacceptable in a modern society that children are sexually exploited and there are no methods for taking care of the victims. The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child states that every child that has been sexually exploited or abused has the right to physical and psychological recovery. This is not the case in Sweden, or any country at present. It is important to have therapeutic support, but only after the child feels safe and has a home to go to, otherwise not even the best therapy in the world will work. That is the first recommended

action, that all children have a safe place to go to. When safety is ensured, therapy can work. The second recommended action is to start research programmes to gain knowledge and clinical experiences to develop better methods of treatment for the victimised children. The third step we recommend is to develop national training programmes for professionals who might get in contact with the victimised children. All countries have to work from their capacity and resources based on the status of knowledge today and what is possible.

# LINKAGES BETWEEN VIEWING INDECENT IMAGES OF CHILDREN AND CONTACT SEXUAL ABUSE: ISSUES FROM RESEARCH

by David Middleton

This paper presents a very brief review in relation to the following questions:

1. What is the risk of escalation for someone who views indecent images moving to contact abuse?
2. Do Internet Offenders share similar psychological characteristics to contact child sex offenders?
3. Is risk related to the type of image viewed or the number of images held by the offender?

## WHAT IS THE RISK OF ESCALATION FOR SOMEONE WHO VIEWS INDECENT IMAGES MOVING TO CONTACT ABUSE?

In relation to the possible escalation of viewing behaviour into contact offending, the evidence is inconclusive. Few studies currently exist on reconviction rates for Internet offenders, primarily due to the relatively recent nature of this form of offensive behaviour. Seto and Eke (2005) looked at criminal records of 201 adult males who had been convicted of possession, distribution or production of child pornography, in order to identify potential predictors of later offences. In total, over a 2.5 year period, 17% of the sample re-offended, however only 6% committed new child pornography offences and

4% commit contact sexual offences. In a later paper Seto and Eke (2006) extended the follow-up period to 3.6 years on 198 offenders from the original sample. It was found that 6.6% had committed a new contact sexual offence during the extended follow-up period, while 7.1% had committed a new child pornography offence.

It is also possible to examine previous conviction history. Wolak, Finkelhor and Mitchell (2005) examined a sample of 1,713 arrests in the USA for possession of child pornography in the 12 months beginning July 2000. They found that 11% had prior sexual offence convictions against children. Other studies of Internet offenders suggest an even lower level of prior convictions. In the UK, for example, Webb et al. (2007) reported that only 8% of their sample of 90 Internet offenders in the UK had any previous convictions.

While O'Brien and Webster (2007), in a study of 123 incarcerated and community-based Internet offenders, found that "the total number of previous convictions for sexual offences against children in the sample was considered to be low".

**CONCLUSION:** All those who view indecent images of children feed the demand for new images to be produced, and therefore children to be abused. Some Internet offenders move into contact sexual abuse or are involved in both online and offline abuse, but the majority do not. Factors such as previous criminal history can help identify those most likely to be involved in contact sexual abuse. However, studies of convicted offenders tell us little about those who are never caught or convicted.

### **DO INTERNET OFFENDERS SHARE SIMILAR PSYCHOLOGICAL CHARACTERISTICS WITH CONTACT CHILD SEX OFFENDERS?**

The research conducted for this paper suggests that they do. Middleton et al (2005; 2006) sought to examine whether there was evidence that dynamic risk factors were congruent between Internet offenders and contact child sex offenders. A sample of 213 offenders convicted of sexualised behaviour associated with Internet use was compared with a sample of 191 sex offenders convicted of contact offences against children. All offenders completed the standard psychometric sex offender assessment battery used in the UK national probation service. The results suggest a number of similarities and in particular the largest clusters for both groups were characterised by intimacy deficits and problems with emotional regulation. Both of these factors have been identified with a higher risk of sexual recidivism (Hanson & Morton-Bourgon, 2004).

It was suggested that the behaviour of those in the intimacy deficits cluster reflects a need to engage in a sexual relationship with another person to alleviate loneliness and to compensate for a lack of intimacy, while individuals in the emotional dysregulation group may offend due to a strong negative state of mind which, in conjunction with the use of sex as a coping or soothing strategy, leads them to seek sexualised images of children to meet their sexual needs. Such offenders will often describe viewing a wide variety of pornography. Unlike those in the intimacy deficits cluster, those in the emotional dysregulation cluster were often in relationships. However, those relationships were often lacking intimacy, and there was also evidence of a negative reaction to stress, either in the relationship or work situations, or both. It is of interest that O'Brien & Webster (2007) found that 40% of the sample were educated to degree level or above and that 90% were employed. Support for findings that Internet offenders report higher levels of intimacy deficits or emotional dysregulation comes from Laulik, Allam and Sheridan (2006), who assessed a sample of 30 Internet offenders under community supervision using the Personality Assessment Inventory (Morey, 1991). They

found that there were significant differences between Internet offenders and a normative population in both interpersonal functioning and affective difficulties.

In terms of deviant sexual arousal similarities between Internet and contact offenders, Seto et al.,(2006) reported on a sample of 685 male patients referred for

assessment of sexual interest and behaviour, including 100 child pornography users. The latter group showed greater sexual arousal towards children (measured by phallometric assessment) than to adults. Overall, child pornography offenders had nearly three times greater odds of showing phallometric arousal towards children than did men who had committed contact sexual offences against children.

**CONCLUSION:** Many Internet offenders have similar psychological characteristics to contact offenders against children. Those who present with a higher proportion of these dynamic risk factors are more likely to become involved in, or move into, contact sexual abuse against children.

### **IS RISK RELATED TO THE TYPE OF IMAGE VIEWED OR THE NUMBER OF IMAGES HELD BY THE OFFENDER?**

In an attempt to relate the number of images viewed to the risk factor, Osborn (2006) assessed 74 Internet offenders under community supervision using Risk Matrix2000 (Thornton et al., 2003) (an actuarial measure of risk, see below), and correlated the risk level to the type of image viewed. The results showed that the offenders categorised as 'most high-risk' viewed images of lower severity than lower-risk offenders. Offenders also categorised in the highest category had not viewed images with the highest severity (Level Five). Even if a larger sample was able to demonstrate a stronger link, one must wonder whether the type of image is a

particular strong indicator of deviant sexual interest. For example, if an individual becomes highly aroused from images of children, clothed or partially clothed, which may not even fall in to Level One, this may suggest a greater problem of deviant arousal, and therefore risk to children, than an individual who requires images depicting sexual penetration.

In practice, therefore, there is only limited support for basing risk assessment on the severity of the image depicted or the size of collection. Unfortunately the unintended consequence may be that the length of sentence passed by a Court could be interpreted as reflecting the level of risk and monitoring or treatment of the offender required to protect the public. Clearly, there is a need for further research on the implications of the types of images viewed and the size of the collection.

**CONCLUSION:** There is limited evidence that the type of online image viewed relates to the risk of further reconviction. Although the literature supports a view that those who sexually abuse very young children tend to reconvict at a higher rate and abuse children of both sexes, it is not clear whether this is also the case for those who view indecent images of very young children. The evidence supports the view that those who commit a wide variety of sexually abusive behaviour (paraphillias) reconvict at a higher rate. It is also unclear as to whether this also applies to those who view a wide variety of abuse images. The number of images held by an individual may not indicate an increased risk of reconviction.

## DISCUSSION POINTS:

- Most people who view indecent images do not also personally engage in contact child sexual abuse. However all who view such images fuel the market for the production of new images and therefore more sexual abuse. Thus, all who view such images should be prosecuted rather than cautioned.
- In addition, many convicted offenders appear not to make the link between viewing images and child sexual abuse. Media campaigns that highlight these links may act as a deterrent to some and therefore should be pursued.
- Assessors should look for evidence of dynamic risk factors, particularly intimacy deficits, anti-social cognitions and personality, and previous conviction history in order to identify those more likely to become involved in both viewing and contact offences.
- More research is required on the link between types and volume of images viewed as indicators of risk, since current assumptions may not be supported.

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# VULNERABILITY AND RESILIENCE AMONG CHILDREN DUE TO SEXUAL ORIENTATION AND/OR GENDER IDENTITY

by Annica Ryng

## RELEVANT RESEARCH AND FINDINGS

The Yogyakarta Principles are based on the application of international human rights law in relation to sexual orientation and gender identity. See: [www.yogyakartaprinciples.org](http://www.yogyakartaprinciples.org)

Principle 11: *The right to protection from all forms of exploitation, sale and trafficking of human beings*

Everyone is entitled to protection from trafficking, sale and all forms of exploitation, including but not limited to, sexual exploitation on the grounds of actual or perceived sexual orientation or gender identity. I will mention a few of the Jurisprudential Annotations to the Yogyakarta Principles that Principle 11 is based upon (the annotations serve as a guide to the legal framework underpinning each principle). The Yogyakarta Principles do not address sexual exploitation and child abuse images online specifically, but rather address exploitation in general. Research was not available on the situation online.

## In context of human rights

The Special Rapporteur on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography, Juan Miguel Petit has reported that: “Gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender adolescents are more exposed to violence, especially psychological violence. Hostile reactions by society to their gender and sexuality may leave them alone in a marginalized situation that exposes them to exploitation” (---) “Some groups are exposed to greater risk of trafficking and sexual exploitation. [...] Those children who are generally more exposed include... homosexuals, lesbians, bisexuals and transgender children. Social exclusion and discrimination are the underlying causes of the higher degree of risk that some groups face vis-à-vis [commercial sexual exploitation of children].”

The report of the Special Rapporteur on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography, Ofelia Calcetas-Santos, has reported that: “Many males run away to escape discrimination based on their sexual orientation. Once living on the streets, poverty and inadequate services make prostitution a viable alternative for such youth.”

## Research Context

The following research does not specifically address sexual exploitation and child abuse images online, but presents a few references that are key to understanding the context and situation for young lesbian, gay, bisexual and transsexual (LGBT) people. The findings must be considered in order to understand how their sexual orientation status affects the group's online behaviour, vulnerability and ability to resilience.

The Norwegian Social Research Institute conducted a sex survey among girls and boys aged 14-16 years of age in Oslo (NOVA Rapport 19/07). Twenty-seven percent of the heterosexual girls answered that they had had sex, whereas 57% of the lesbian/bisexual girls answered that they had had sex. In response to the same question, 29% of the heterosexual boys answered that they had had sex, while 64% of the homosexual/bisexual boys answered that they had had sex.

Among the young people that answered that they had had sex, 2% of the heterosexual girls answered that they had had sex before the age of 11 and 17% of the lesbian/bisexual girls answered that they had had sex before the age of 11. In response to the same question, the boys' responses showed that 6% of the heterosexual boys had had sex before the age of 11 and 46% of the homosexual/bisexual boys answered that they had had sex before the age of 11.

Researcher Bera Olstein Moseng writes in the report that one cannot eliminate the fact that they (the boys and girls above) could be victims of sexual abuse. Moseng also addresses the issue that anecdotes imply that lesbian and bisexual girls are over represented among girls with sexually addictive behavior in terms of heterosexual sex.

Research conducted by Carl Göran Svedin and Gisela Priebe on *Selling Sex in a Population-Based Study of High School Seniors in Sweden, 2007*, shows that among bisexual girls, there are overwhelmingly more girls that have sold sex (52.3%) than the bisexual girls that had not (15.6%). The bisexual girls also sold sex more times (52.2%) than heterosexual girls (43.5%). Among boys selling sex, 10.8% were homosexual, 13.5% bisexual and 75.7% heterosexual.

International research also shows that young LGBT people in a poor health situation have much worse conditions than young people in general. The use of alcohol and drugs, the number of victims of violence, and the percentage that have suicidal thoughts and attempts are alarmingly high.

## GAPS AND RECOMMENDED ACTIONS

### Lack of research

Recommendation: Include sexual orientation and gender identity as variables and parameters in research.

*Sexual orientation:* One can separate practice and experience, identity and preference

*Gender identity:* One can separate between [Make a distinction between?] biological, mental and social gender, i.e., the sex you are born with, the gender you identify with, and the one you socially live as or the gender you are perceived to have.

### Problems to address in the context of Internet-related sexual exploitation

Fact: Most young people and children who question their sexual orientation and gender identity will turn to the Internet to try to get in contact with other LGBT people or other people who have similar thoughts. This is due to:

- Negative attitudes, discrimination and homophobia
- Lack of support from family and friends (A Norwegian study (NOVA, Ung i Oslo 2006) shows that homosexual and bisexual children aged 14-16 years are victims of violence by their parents more

than other young people (girls 12% vs 3% and boys 16% vs 2%)

- The child will probably not tell anyone (not a friend or family member) about his or her online activities (due to fear of being caught talking about or spending time on LGBT online communities)
- When they get in trouble, they will not seek help and support (fear of reprisal from family as well as fear of being misjudged and badly treated in contact with the judicial system)
- Young LGBT people and children are isolated and alone in their online contacts.
- The anonymity of online encounters can be especially appealing to LGBT people who are not “out” with their sexual orientation or gender identity and who fear being “outed”.
- When a child/young person seeks contact online due to questioning their own sexual orientation or gender identity, they are in need of identification with others and acknowledgement of their identity (to be able to build self-esteem and confidence → in relation to the shame, guilt and internalised homophobia that usually comes with/reflects the view on LGBT within the home and the overall society).
- When seeking contact online, young LGBT people have an additional vulnerability and risk of falling

victim to sexual exploitation due to their gender identity and sexual orientation.

- Another very important aspect is the risk of, not only being subject to sexual exploitation, but also hate crimes. (Example from Sweden, “Smeden” presented himself as being gay, formed sexual relationships online, invited the men over and in some instances killed or attempted to kill them). Another form of sexual violence is “curative rape”, to cure lesbian and bisexual women.
- Another aspect is poverty. LGBT people have a greater risk of being subjected to poverty due to sexual orientation and gender identity. For example, those who are rejected by their families, homeless people, women who refuse to get married to men in societies where women cannot make it on their own, and so on.

*Crucial to reducing the risk of sexual exploitation online and offline and for increasing young LGBT people’s ability to resilience are:*

- Safe and open online spaces → the need for a space/community to meet other LGBT young people to talk to, but also a safe space with accurate information about LGBT, how to get more information and where to turn to (if there are any LGBT organizations etc.)
- Most Internet communities are heteronormative (meaning: assumes all young people are

*heterosexual and looking for friends or relations of the opposite sex).*

- It is important to take notice of that, when companies and organizations choose filters that block content that is presumed bad for children, “good” websites for LGBT organizations and safe community spaces also get blocked (due to words like “lesbian” being associated with pornographic sites).
- If children do not have any safe community spaces and professional organisations to turn to on the Internet, they become even more vulnerable to abuse and sexual exploitation.
- Safe online spaces are a central need for LGBT children to dare to report sexual exploitation.
- Overall work against homophobia, biphobia and transphobia in the society → children need to feel safe, not afraid, and comfortable to talk about their feelings without being judged, questioned or rejected!
- Do not forget - contact with grown-up LGBT people can be empowering and important for young LGBT people. (Role models, support and help where society and family fails and so on)

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