Internet offenders

How the Internet is used as part of sexually abusive behaviour

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Thames Valley
January 2011
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Introduction

- In 2000, there were approximately 360 million internet users worldwide
- In 2010, there are approximately 1,996 million internet users worldwide
- There are 475 million users in Europe, from a population of 813 million (58%)
- British users rose from 9% in 1998, to 52% in 2005, to 82% in 2010
- Approximately 42% of Internet users admit to visiting pornographic web sites

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Facts & Figures

- There are 4.2 million sex related websites (12% of the total)
- However, 60% of web traffic passes through them!
- 25% of search engine requests relate to sex or pornography
- In the UK, BT 'Cleanfeed' blocked 11,000 attempts to access illegal sites per day in 2004, and 35,000 in 2006

Facts & Figures

- In 2001 there were 23,000 web sites, and 40,000 chat rooms dedicated to child/adult sex
- Between 2005 and 2009 there was a 432% increase in abusive video images sent for analysis to NCMEC
- 20 million unique 'IP addresses' have been identified which have offered abusive imagery by Peer to Peer protocols
- The illegal trade in imagery is estimated to be worth between $2-$3 Billion

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The 'Triple 'A' Engine' (Cooper)

- Access: it's there

- Affordability:it's cheap

- Anonymity: you think no one knows you're looking

Range of 'malevolent' uses of the Internet

- To traffic abusive images of children, for personal or commercial gain
- To locate children to molest
- To engage in inappropriate communication with children
- To communicate with other like minded individuals
- To acquire 'grooming' material
- To harass and bully peers

On line grooming

David Finkelhor's research:

- **129 men arrested for molesting children they met 'on line.'**
- **95% did not pretend to be peers: they were who they said they were.**
- **Most were in E mail contact for more than a month prior to meeting.**

On line grooming

- **80% had telephone contact prior to meeting.**
- **80% were explicit, prior to meeting, that they wanted sex/intimacy**
- **84% of the sexual offences were 'age related', not 'coercion related.'**
- **75% of the victims met the perpetrator more than once**

American Psychological Association 2004, 2008

Sources of Abusive material

- File sharing programmes 'Peer to Peer': such as 'Napster', 'Kazaar', 'emule' etc
- 'Newsgroups'
- E mail
- Internet Relay Chat
- Photo sharing sites, and 'the cloud.'
- 'Private' networks, such as 'Wonderland'
- Pay sites, such as 'Landslide'

Abusive Material: Newsgroups

- 1999: average of 4 new children per month in 'child sex' newsgroups
- 2002: 20 'new' children appeared over a six week period, August-September
- Postings in one newsgroup in that year included:

397 images of babies and toddlers (3 months-3 years)

1350 images of children,106 different children

90% of images were less than 4 years old

Abusive Material: Pay Sites

- 'Landslide' had 35,000 subscribers
- It advertised itself as a site where indecent imagery of children and teenagers could be accessed via credit card
- It made $1.4 million per month
- 'Landslide' was investigated and closed by the United States Postal Inspection Service

Abusive Material: Pay Sites

- 'Landslide' led to Operation Ore in the UK
- One side effect of the widespread publicity about Operation Ore is that we have a greater awareness of pay sites rather than free sites
- Over half of abusive material is available from free sites, or is traded.
- Peer to Peer sites predominate

Our Philosophy

- We need to understand:

1. Sexual offending against children, and
2. Sexual interest in children, and
3. Understand the function and structure of the internet, and the psychological character of the internet

   Before we can understand the use of the internet by sexual offenders

New technologies are not the problem

- **The internet is neutral**
- **In many ways the Internet is not the problem, any more than video recorders, or telephones, or type writers are at the root of abusive imagery**
- **We need to separate the means from the meaning, and the behaviour**

New technologies are not the problem

- **Adults with a sexual interest in children, and empathy deficits in viewers are the problem.**
- **Most viewers of abusive imagery have to suspend their empathic response to it if they are to remain engaged with it**
- **Many viewers of abusive imagery are aroused by what they see, but their arousal can take a number of forms: it may not simply be sexual**

The 'Manic High'

- **Well established connection between masturbation and reinforcement, and possibly between masturbation and escalation**
- **One can suggest that a connection to the force of the viewer's arousal leads to the temporary elevation of the temporary physiological high to the level of elation and omnipotence: the masturbator becomes God.**

- ***From a psychoanalytic point of view, those very qualities of the internet which render it powerful, also bestow a potential for manic excitement and omnipotence***

'Fantastic' aspect of the Internet

- ***The individual can pursue sexual fantasies without any reliance on another person. In the use of pornography there is no unpredictable other who might accept or reject, cherish or criticize them. With both pornography and chat rooms the person can avoid the exposure entailed in intimacy with a partner: exposure of the physical body and aspects of themselves about which they feel ashamed or vulnerable***

Dependency and Vulnerability

- **Involvement in cyber sex, or collecting abusive imagery, or molestation may serve to replace the potentially anxious feelings of dependency and vulnerability which mark flesh and blood, consensual relationships.**
- **We feel dependent when the desired object has will, self determination and desires of its own, or is simply capricious**
- **We feel vulnerable at the prospect of abandonment, betrayal, impotence, etc**

Control, Triumph, Contempt

- **Where we can control an object (or person), we can depend upon it without experiencing feelings of dependence.**
- **Feelings of triumph devalue the object (or person), and counter feelings of longing or pining, or the need to please**
- **Feelings of contempt devalue the object (or person.) A valueless object is not worthy of concern or guilt. It can be treated mercilessly, because its fate is of no consequence.**

Therefore

- **Children in images are always available, never resist, and never reject**
- **They are both objects of arousal, and of contempt**
- **They can trigger a variety of thoughts and feelings, without thoughts or feelings being expended upon them: they are objects, not persons**

Court of Appeal Guidelines August 2002 (R v Oliver)

Accepts the philosophical view that those possessing indecent images of children

"**should be treated as being in some way complicit in the original abuse which was involved in the making of the images. Sentences for possession should reflect the continuing damage done to victims through copying or dissemination.**"

Motivations for abusive internet use

Erotic/Sexual:

Fodder for masturbatory fantasies

Availability of sexually stimulating material outside the viewer's experience

A reliable source of arousal and sexual comfort

Opportunities to engage in sexual 'conversation' and flirt with child

Motivations for abusive internet use

Cognitive

Possible to view children having 'enjoyable' sex with other children and adults; the 'ideology' of the image is seductive

Opportunities to explore and develop deviant ideologies in safety

The reinforcement of cognitive distortions through sharing ideas, fantasies, experiences

Motivations for abusive internet use

Cognitive

The 'no crime' feeling

An abandonment of moral constraint

Anonymity allows a choice of masks and personalities, 'SEX GOD' vs. 'ineffectual little man'

Motivations for abusive internet use
Emotional

Revisiting childhood trauma/abuse

Emotional avoidance/refuge: an escape from difficult feelings

Emotional disregulation: impulsiveness, poor 'emotional literacy'

Motivations for abusive internet use
Pragmatic

The breadth of material available: both paid and free/exchanged

On line banking, shopping, communication: why not abuse?

The safety provided by being one in a crowd of millions

Motivations for abusive internet use

Communal

Sense of community and social connection

Sense of power, mastery, and status

Mutually assured growth and dependency, especially in societies/clubs/private networks

Opportunities to share home made imagery, erotica, trophies, etc

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Motivations for abusive internet use
Abuse Related

Access to teen Chat Rooms, to discover current trends and fashions (Lurking.)

A means of approaching children for sex in Chat Rooms

Source of 'grooming' material: pornography to entrap children and normalise adult/child sex

Source of material to justify own behaviour

Stop it Now! helpline calls

- Internet offenders now constitute the largest single group of callers to the helpline

- Majority are arrested but pre-charge/pre-conviction

- Helpline number usually obtained from police when arrested, but some via web search or solicitor

Stop it Now! helpline calls

Between 1st June 2002 and 16th February 2010, 1426 separate individuals called concerned about their Internet behaviour (99% male):

Internet offenders	1318 (92%)
Potential Internet offenders	108 (8%)

Of those offending, just under 15% reported that they had not been arrested

INFORM +

- For those admitting accessing etc. indecent images of children on-line
- 10 X weekly sessions (2.5 hours each)
- Up to 9 participants
- Individuals pay to attend (cost under review)

Aims of Inform +

- To provide information to aid understanding of internet (child pornography) offending
- To encourage participants to explore their personal involvement with internet offending, in a supportive group setting
- To consider practical and realistic methods of self-management/control

Inform+ programme content

Focus on offences, fantasy, addiction/compulsion and habits, collecting behaviours, disclosure, relationships and Social Skills, victim empathy, the legal process, relapse prevention and lifestyle change

Common themes arising from INFORM + participants

Dominant theme: "If only I'd known the consequences…"

Regret – family impact, career, stigma

Self-control – experience of viewing as 'addictive'

Fears – disclosures, reprisals, the future

Anger – at self, the authorities, the Internet itself, ISPs, sense of disproportionality

Self-esteem

Challenges for INFORM+ facilitators

- Dealing with **frustration** – hopelessness about the future, 'Social Services bashing'
- Containing **disclosure** – sharing of their personal details, contact outside of the group
- Challenging **complacency** – encouraging identification of ongoing vulnerabilities and development of appropriate strategies
- Navigating focus away from extremes of **self-loathing** and **denial**

The Functions of denial for perpetrators

- **Loss of relationships:** You/my wife/my parents will reject me if I admit
- **Fear of Punishment:** I'll go to Jail/get beaten up/ lose my children/ have to do a group if I admit
- **Fear of Stigma:** I'll be in the newspaper, I'll be seen as a 'nonce', if I admit
- **Loss of self esteem:** If I admit, it means I'm a paedophile

What 'risk'?

- Likelihood of continuing to download?
- Likelihood of 'becoming' hands on?
- Likelihood of causing emotional harm?
- Impact of the behaviour on the family?

Seriousness vs risk

Research does not tell us that SERIOUSNESS of images viewed (as per Court of Appeal) = level of risk of the offender (Crassati 2008)

"The use of pornography is neither a necessary, nor sufficient condition for contact sexual offences." (Taylor & Quayle)

Things we need to consider

- Offender's motives
- What needs the behaviour was serving to meet
- How they have overcome their internal and external inhibitors
- Whether any features of their on-line behaviour indicate risk of direct harm to a child
- Our assumptions and preconceptions…

Understanding the individual

- We need to separate the means from the meaning, and the offence label. i.e.:
  - Motivation to start Internet offending
  - Drivers for continuing the behaviour
  - Are not necessarily the same

What are we assessing for?

- Likelihood of continuing to download?
- Likelihood of 'becoming' hands on?
- Likelihood of causing emotional harm?
- Impact of the behaviour on the family?

Crossover studies

- **Proportions of men arrested by USPIS for possession of abusive imagery <u>have</u> also been found to have been molesting children in the real world (U.S. Postal Inspection Service: 37% - 40%, New Zealand censorship compliance unit: 50%)**
- **UK Operation Ore: 0% - 5% (50% in Merthyr Tydfil: 2 in 4! 0% in Surrey: nil from 35+)**

Low Crossover:

<u>Birmingham University, UK, 2006</u>

647 contact offenders, 17 reconvicted in 2 years

62 contact offenders, 16 reconvicted in 4 years

74 imagery offenders,

  0 reconvicted in 2 years
   0 reconvicted in 4 years

Low Crossover

- **Seto & Eke (2006) (Canada)**
  In Ontario. 201 adult males followed-up over 3.5 yrs.
     7.1% - new child abuse images
     6% - new contact offences

Medium Crossover

- **Wolak et al (2005):**
  40% had convictions for both contact and possession offences.
  But most of these started out as investigations into contact offences – i.e. the law officers found child abuse images during their investigations.

Medium Crossover

- Where the case <u>started</u> as an investigation into possession of abuse images:
  14% had evidence of contact offences
  2% had images *and* attempted to solicit online
  84% had images, but no evidence of contact offence

High Crossover:

<u>New York Times, July 07</u>

155 male inmates, Butner prison North Carolina, all incarcerated for possession/distribution of child pornography

26% admitted prior contact offences on arrival, with 75 victims admitted

85% admitted prior contact offences after treatment, with 1,777 victims admitted

Stop it Now! helpline calls

Calls were received from 770 separate individuals concerned about an Internet offender between 1 June 2002 and 17 February 2010:

- 146 males (19%)
- 624 females (81%)

Of these,
- 327 were partners/ex-partners (42%)
- 228 were family members (30%)
- 47 were friends (6%)
- 37 were others (5%)
- 131 did not provide details of the relationship (17%)

Stop it Now! helpline calls

Typical concerns

- Individual's Internet use is secretive and/or excessive – is there a problem?
- Caller has discovered illegal or dubious pictures on the individual's computer
- Wanting to know if the behaviour is indicative of off line problems
- Legal ramifications of the behaviour
- Wanting the individual to get professional help vs fear of the fall out of disclosure

Stop it Now! helpline calls

Common questions

- "Am I being paranoid?"
- "Is he a paedophile?"
- "Am I partly to blame?" (parents, partners)
- "He says he's okay now and hasn't downloaded/viewed for months/years… Does he still have a problem?"
- "Will Social Services take the children if he stays at home?"
- "What should I do?"

Consequences for partners

- Confusion
- Self-esteem
- Identity
- Jealousy
- Sexual relationship
- Stigma – association with 'paedophile' etc
- Guilt
- Anger

Aims of INFORM

- To provide factual information about child pornography and the Internet
- To provide the means by which participants can better understand the process of Internet offending
- To examine risk associated with this behaviour
- To look at practical strategies for establishing and maintaining a culture of safer Internet use in future
- To provide a safe and flexible space for participants to discuss the impact on themselves and their families

Themes arising within INFORM

Dominant theme: Why did he do it?

What to do about the relationship? View of relationship viability tends to fluctuate markedly during the life of the programme and beyond

Practicalities – impact issues for partner's job; impact of Social Services involvement for children & wider family, financial, travel, etc…

Disclosure – Fears of reprisals, 'guilty by association', impact upon social contacts

Challenges for INFORM facilitators

Dealing with 'blind spots' - risk recognition and denial of problem

Group dynamics - 'cosiness'; domination by one group member; venting of emotions vs 'Social Services bashing'

Avoiding over-disclosure and overspill into counselling/therapy relationship

Offering support, not creating dependency

Encouraging group members to make their own, informed decisions about the future

Functions of denial for partners

- To avoid challenging the meaning of their relationship
- To avoid the loss of the relationship
- To avoid the loss of the 'other' parent
- Fear of stigma
- To contain threat to low self esteem
- To avoid being seen as a bad parent
- Because a lie can be more comfortable than the truth

Conclusions

- The Internet has led to an exponential growth in the numbers and range of people accessing abusive material
- The Internet brings profound child protection challenges into the home
- Children in families with a 'viewing' parent can be deeply traumatised by the relationship fall out and by the actions of authorities seeking to protect them

Conclusions

- The Internet may change a whole generation's views about child/adult sex, and may introduce a new cohort of men to the notion and desirability of child/adult sexual contact

- Time will tell. In the meantime we must take steps to raise awareness of the problem and to offer appropriate information, education and support to those affected.