



Centre for Abuse and Trauma Studies
Applied research in the digital age



Evening Lecture Child Victims Online: Current Research & Policy

**Professor Julia Davidson, PhD,
Faculty of Law, Middlesex
University, London**

**Interpol Specialist Meeting Crimes
Against Children, Lyon , 28th-30th
October 2013**



“It’s such a vicious place, the internet, though”

Child Victim ROBERT Project

Quayle, Jonsson & Loof, p 45, 2012

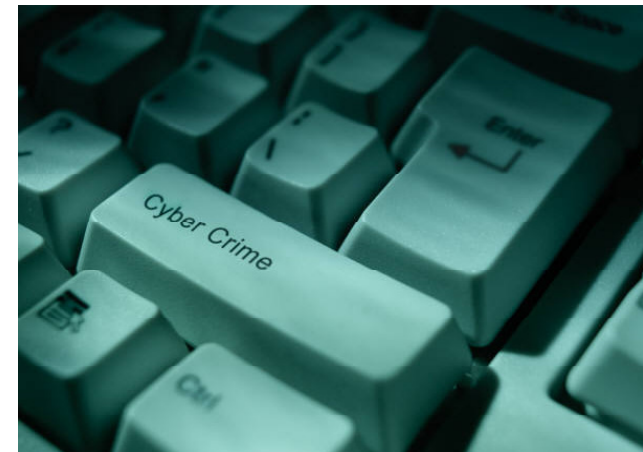


Child Abuse Online: Context & Policy

Types of Harm

- Online grooming/sexual solicitation
- Cyberbullying
- Self taken images
- Trolling

Focus on child victims of grooming



Legislation

- UK – bullying , harassment etc not covered in criminal or civil law by one act (add relevant acts) – legal definition difficult as covers range of behaviours , danger of criminalising YP.
- Several member states have grooming legislation (UK, Netherlands, Norway & Sweden)
- EU directive (November 2011)
 - member states *must* introduce grooming and child indecent image legislation within two years
 - minimum sentences: three years in prison for producers of child indecent images, one year for consumers, ten years for forcing children into sexual acts

http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_data/docs/pressdata/en/jha/126068.pdf



EU Directive: Challenges

- Global offence- Legal definition of *child* determined by legal age of consent, varies widely across Europe - as low as 13 in some EU countries
- Difficult to prosecute across jurisdictions
- Precautionary nature - requires compelling (and difficult to obtain) evidence regarding the '*intention*' to commit offence (Kool, 2011)
- Reluctance to enforce law SoA in the UK, very few convictions in Sweden . May be concealed by other primary offences, difficult to estimate prev.



Children's Online Experience

- Incidence varies in studies –sample and methodological approach , validity issues of self report survey eg honesty , context etc
- Schulz et al (2013 forthcoming) Survey of general adult population ,1% had communicated about a sexual topic with unknown adolescents , 0.5% with children
- Jones, Mitchell & Finkelhor(2012)- 9 % of US-adolescents aged 10 to 17 reported having experienced unwanted sexual solicitation
- Livingstone et al (2011) EU survey - 15 % of 11 to 16-year-olds in Europe had received a sexual message online
- 1 in 5 young people in UK receive online sexual solicitation (Davidson et al 2011)



Children More Frequently Victimised Online?

- Little research in this area exploring experience, difficult to say which children are more likely to be victimised
- Adolescents more frequently victimised (Baumgartner et al. , 2010: Livingstone et al., 2012)
- Girls also seem to be more at risk (Mitchell et al., 2007a; Wells & Mitchell, 2008: Wolak et al., 2008)
- Young people who identify themselves as homosexual (Wolak et al., 2004)

Victim choice & Offender Characteristics

- Older adolescents more likely than younger adolescents and children to be groomed online (Webster et al, 2012 found a mean age of 13)
- Online groomers more often report a hebephilic sexual interest (i.e. interest in pubertal children and adolescents) than a pedophilic (i.e. interest in pre-pubertal children) (Bergen, Antfolk, Jern, Alanko, & Santtila, submitted ; Seto, Wood, Babchishin, & Flynn, 2012; Wolak, Finkelhor, Mitchell, & Ybarra, 2008).
- Predominantly male and generally well educated (Seto, Wood, Babchishin, & Flynn, 2012), with a high IQ (Webster et al , 2012) .
- High level of ICT knowledge (Webster et al, 2012)



Child Victims & Online Grooming

The European Online Grooming Project_

- Largest study of online grooming to date.
- Aims:
 - understand the different ways sexual offenders approach, communicate and ‘groom’ young people online.
 - empower policy makers, front line professionals, teachers, carers and young people to effectively manage online risks.
- Funded by the European Commission Safer Internet Plus Programme. June 2009 to March 2012.



Research Design

- Four interlinked research phases (6/2009- 6/2012):
 1. Semi –structured scoping interviews stakeholders (police officers, treatment providers, industry specialists), content analysis police case-files; literature review; analysis of offender/victim chat-logs;
 2. In-depth interviews with convicted online groomers in the UK, Norway, Italy & Belgium;
 3. Focus groups with children (UK, Belgium & Italy)
 4. Dissemination workshops with parents and teachers (UK, Italy, Norway & Belgium)

Budget : €470,000

Data analysed using Framework, case and theme based approach to analysis.



Context

- Research focused on interviewing online groomers only - there was no direct contact with victims
- Themes included in the offender interview regarding age and choice of victims and type of grooming approach
- As noted earlier, victims tended to be female aged 13-15
- Groomers were clear that the majority of young people online appear resilient, but were able to identify characteristics that made them targets as vulnerable or risk-taking.



Resilient Young People

- Evidence of safety messages getting through:
- *‘It was not easy as young girls had been taught not to talk to guy’s age 20’*
 - *‘When presented own identity, was told ‘piss off you nonce’.*
 - *‘sometimes they would hang up and I’d just forget it’.*
 - *‘I wouldn’t get cross if the girls said ‘no’ I would just move on to the next one’.*



Vulnerable Victims

Vulnerability Feature	Distinguishing Themes
High need for attention and affection	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Loneliness• Low self-esteem
Difficult relationships with parents and difficult home lives	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Psychological disorder(s)• Concurrent sexual abuse
Seeking 'love' on the internet. Believe they have a true relationship with groomer.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Offender as 'mentor'• Self-disclosure and joint problem solving
Resist disclosure because they want to continue the relationship.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Loyalty



Victim Characteristics – Vulnerable Group

- One victim described problems at school, struggled with maths.
- One victims was a boy in foster care.
- *Victim ‘really quiet when met, even after a few meetings she never really said anything’*
- *‘She wanted attention in her life, she said she had lost her mum and her step-dad abused her’.*
- *‘she had problems in her life, I exploited that. Underneath she was quite shy’.*
- *‘Many of the girls lacked adult contact....they felt safe with me.. I always made time...I learned about their lives and it was important to them.. some felt lonely and forgotten at home’.*
- *‘The girls were definitely insecure and lonely.’*
- *‘When a girl said she was in love with me, it was much easier to handle’*



Online Vulnerability

- Findings supported by other research
- Vulnerable YP more at risk (Wells & Mitchell, 2008)
- History of physical or sexual abuse at greater risk of becoming victims of online sexual abuse (Mitchell et al., 2007b; Noll et al., 2009).
- YP who have family conflicts also more at risk (Sorensen , 2007).

Comparison of Victim & Offender Data,

European Online Grooming Project (Webster, Davidson & Quayle , 2013) : ROBERT (Quayle, Jonsson & Loof, 2012)

Child Victims Experience

Quayle, Jonsson & Loof (2012)

ROBERT study

- Qualitative study
- 6 EU countries .
- YP aged 11-17, 82% female, depth interviewing with interview guide.
- All had experience SA offline following online grooming

Key Themes

- Something's missing from my life;
- Being someone who's connected;
- Caught in a Web;
- Making choices;
- Others responding, and
- Closing the box and picking up the pieces

Something's Missing from my Life

- Dealing with the bad things in life;
- Wanting to be understood;
- Needing space to do things my way,
- Wanting to explore sex

“... my social worker had me moved away from my home because my father was abusing me”

“And then I’ll look in the mirror and I’ll be like oh my god, I’m getting fat, and then I’ll start getting really uncomfortable. And then I’ll try and starve myself in the day”

“It was a way of hurting myself... I didn’t think I was worth more”

Something's Missing from my Life: Victim & Offender Quotes



Victims

“I was feeling good about what was happening between him and me, because I felt as though it was cosy and it was fun and I kind of got the attention I felt that I had been missing”

“No, I only got affirmation that I was somebody”

Offenders

‘she had problems in her life, I exploited that. Underneath she was quite shy’.

‘Many of the girls lacked adult contact....they felt safe with me.. I always made time...I learned about their lives and it was important to them.. some felt lonely and forgotten at home’.

‘The girls were definitely insecure and lonely.’

‘When a girl said she was in love with me, it was much easier to handle’

Caught in a Web

- Online sexual activity – drawn into destructive events
- Seeming like a normal relationship;
- Telling lies;
- Being groomed;
- Losing control;
- Betrayal.

Caught in a Web: Normalisation

Victims

- *“... helped make the whole thing seem more normal than it was, like*
- *something completely normal”*
- *“I just think I was curious. I sat and I thought ‘why not?’ Now I have the chance to... to meet someone new. Or something like that”*

Offenders (normalisation & desensitisation)

G: Just take advantage, you’re talking to a grown-up. Try to be more... you know... open-minded. Why not? ...Now that I told you how to take full figure or naked pictures, you can practice.

V: No, no, never.

G: I didn’t mean you have to send them. You can practice. You can take some and then cancel them. It’s not that bad....

Caught in a Web: Telling Lies & Risk Management

Victims

' that it was kind of – a little strange when he said something about how I shouldn't say anything about it to my parents"

"All of the sexual things he wanted me to do. And the fact that I had to keep lying to my parents – I had a really hard time with that"

Offenders(risk management)

G: Maybe or maybe not? Can someone come into your bedroom suddenly? Can it happen?

M: Not if I close the door, no.

G: Are you allowed to keep your door closed? To lock yourself in?

M: Yes.

G: Ah, nice... not a lot of girls are allowed to. Ok, close it please.....Perfect, but be careful, when I text you on the phone... Don't forget to delete it when we share phrases, right?

Caught in a Web: Being Groomed

Victims :Loss of Control

“It was that he... well he started asking me if I had a good body and started getting kind of offensive towards me and that kind of thing’

“Forced me to take pictures of myself, because otherwise he would come over to my home. And he knew where I lived and that kind of thing”

Offenders : Use of Incentives & Threats

‘offered to top-up mobile phones for phone sex’.

‘I offered CDs of favourite bands’.

‘I sent romantic song lyrics”

‘ I threatened to show naked pictures and videos of her if she refused to meet me’.

Caught in a Web: Being Overpowered & Self Blaming

“So I stayed at his and it wasn’t until the morning, which was when it got really bad, was, I was woken up by him banging my head against the metal pole of the metal headrest of the bed, and that’s when he raped me”.

“At the time it didn’t feel like a rape. It was more like it was my fault. I was in love with one of them and I had [got] drunk so I couldn’t remember anything... well”.

“It got worse after the second rape... it was the same guy and then I thought that it had to... then I only had myself to blame in some way...”.

Victim Disclosure

- Some chose to remain in relationship / missed contact when discovered
- Some didn't know how to tell those close to them
- Abuse played constantly on their minds
- Some reported abuse

“... and then I thought that I cannot tell my parents because they will be just as sad as him. So then I thought that ... I cannot tell anyone about this”.

“Well I didn't tell anyone in the family at all really. I told my friend in school about it and then she went and told the head of sixth form and then the police were involved, social services were involved, then the family found out”.

Online Identity Deception

Identity Deception Online

- Research - 20-50% of offenders use identity deception, but really an unknown (Briggs et al., 2011; Malesky, 2007; Shannon, 2008; Wolak et al., 2004)
- Not all convicted groomers use deception (Webster, Davidson & Bifulco, 2013 forthcoming)
- Can be used in '*offence maintenance*' (Webster, Davidson & Bifulco, 2013) or '*deceptive trust development*' (Choo, 2009) to ensure child's compliance
- Most commonly related to age but not always, can be gender as well. Some offenders can use multiple identities to interact with different children on SNS (Webster et al., 2012, 2013).
- Using a picture of someone else, and portraying oneself as physically more attractive also occur (Quayle et al., 2012)
- YP use identity deception online as well (Webster, Davidson & Bifulco 2013(forthcoming), Quayle, Jonsson & Loof, 2012)

Online Identity Deception

Bergen et al , 2013 (Ref: Bergen, Davidson, Johansson, Santtila, Schulz & Schumann, 2013 (forthcoming))

- Online survey of adults in Finland , Germany & Sweden
- Non-probability , self-selecting sample (limitations in terms of representativeness)
- Sample- link on FB , Twitter , other online social forums. e.g., lifestyle, hobbies, interests, or forums maintained by radio channels etc.), and through e-mailing lists for students at universities and vocational universities in all three countries
- Participants were informed survey would include questions about online activities, online social contacts and online sexual behavior.
- Respondents interacting sexually with an adult (N=640) and those interacting sexually with a child (N= 136) . Total N= 776

Online Identity Deception: Findings

- Examples of survey Qs - *“Did you change any aspect of yourself during your contact?”* If a participant replied in affirmative, they answered *“What aspects of yourself did you change?”*
- 72.1% of the participants that had a child or an adolescent contact were men, compared with 55.5% of the participants that had an adult contact
- The age difference between the two groups was significant with the participants with a child or an adolescent contact being younger than those with an adult contact

Online Identity Deception: Findings

- The extent of online deception did not vary between the adult contact and child contact groups;
- However participants with a child contact more likely to pretend to be under 18 and more likely to use a false photo than those with an adult contact;
- Within the child contact group, there was a positive association with using any identity deception and receiving a sexual picture ;
- Secrecy - Suggesting keeping the online interactions and the offline meeting a secret increased the likelihood of having engaged in sexual contact offline with the child or adolescent.

Summary Key issues

- Research exploring children's online behaviour scratched the surface
- Legislation in the EU may not be enforced, effective education as important in terms of prevention
- Converged environment – vulnerability remains, not fixed
- Risk taking children can become vulnerable
- Offenders seek and exploit vulnerable children
- Difficult issues – two way interaction , more research needed to explore children's online relationships
- Identity deception common amongst children and offenders
- Need for practitioner training in children's and offenders online behaviour

Implications for Police Practice: Investigation

Child Victims

- Understand children's online behaviour
- May not view as abusive
- Concealed /protecting abuser
- Some children more vulnerable
- Victim screening Qs in investigative interviews –Internet activity (UK- ABE interviews) – requires practitioner knowledge of children's Internet use
- Low self esteem and self worth , importance of 'buddy' or advocate in investigative process
- Importance of good inter-agency collaboration in understanding the issue – joint training?

Offenders

- Seek out vulnerable YP
- Need for effective risk assessment , standard tests may not be adequate
- Aware of tactics employed in terms of behaviour and technology
- Screen al SO s – Internet use and potential contact in investigative interview
- Importance of good inter-agency collaboration – social services, CPS , Judiciary

Implications for Practice: Prevention & Education

Resilient Children (majority)

- Least likely to interact with groomer/crossover into risk taking during adolescence
- Low risk of meeting groomer
- Safety needs met through standard awareness programmes , need to educate on ethical use of Internet

Risk-takers

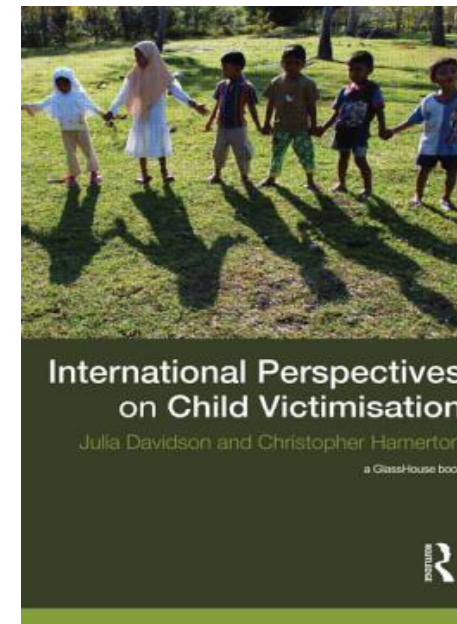
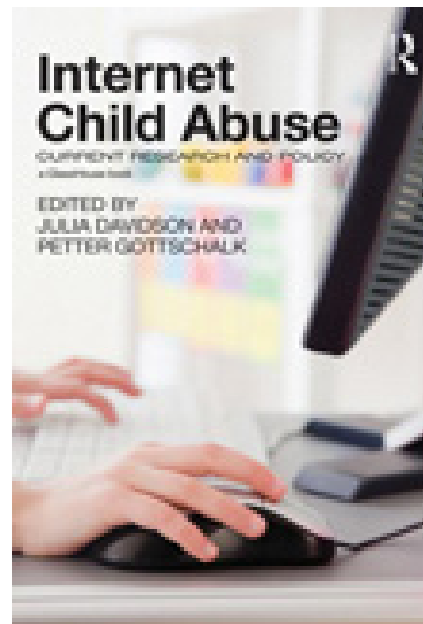
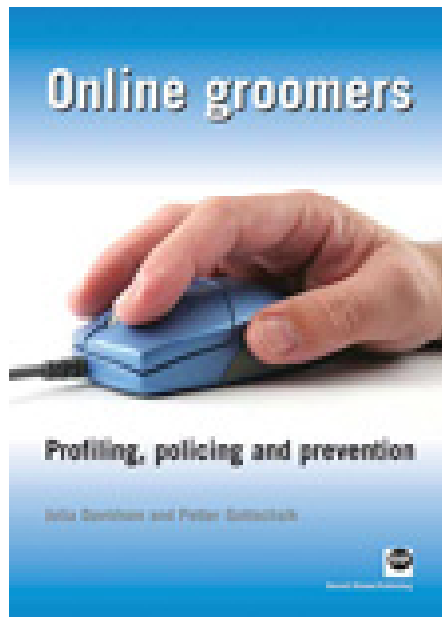
- Willing to interact , send provocative images or text. 'game playing' .
- Unlikely to meet, but may be blackmailed
- Safety needs met through standard programmes- some emphasis on appropriate use of SNS

Vulnerable (minority)

- Willing to interact, seeking relationships/friendship
- Targeted & high risk of meeting, easier to manipulate
- Vulnerable offline- safeguarding services?
- Needs exceed standard programme , practitioners screening YP for Internet related abuse?

Books

Thanks for your attention



- Forthcoming: Webster, Davidson & Bifulco (2013) '**Online Offending Behaviour and Child Victimization : New findings and Policy**' Palgrave

•

Contact



**Professor Julia Davidson .
Centre for Abuse & Trauma Studies,
Middlesex University**

j.davidson@mdx.ac.uk

Twitter @juliadavidson13

www.cats-rp.org.uk

