

**What German professionals assisting children know  
about children with experiences of  
abusive and exploitative practices in the online environment**

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This lecture tries to address three different parts of the problem:

1. Child-pornographic-exploitation – the distribution of abusive images
2. Online grooming
3. Peer to Peer issues

**1. Child pornographic exploitation**

From 2004 until 2007 Innocence in Danger undertook a study concerning Care and Treatment of child-victims of child-pornographic exploitation in Germany.

84,8% professionals reported „no“ or „rare“ confrontation with CPE and 14,6% professionals reported „some“ or much confrontation with CPE within their work.

From 2000 until 2005 a total of **245** child and adolescent victims of CPE were being treated: **197 girls and 48 boys**. **Most girls** (116) and **most boys** (37) were aged 6 – 14.

42% suspected CPE in **218 cases** (suspicion of CPE for boys was 3times as high as for girls). 58% had no such suspicion. 74% knew of no cases where CPE images had been distributed via Internet.

**Types of abusive images** were sexual acts between child/adolescent and adults; touching of genitals; vaginal abuse; oral abuse; posing for nude pictures and photographing/filming genitals.

50% of the professionals did not know if abusive images of girls had been publicized via Internet. Regarding boys the insecurity was even greater. But 15 girls and 5 boys knew that “their” images had been publicized via Internet. 6 girls and 5 boys had even seen ‘their’ pictures in the Internet.

Professionals suspected distribution of CPE images via Internet for 24 girls and 16 boys. On the other hand 11 girls and 13 boys expressed such a suspicion themselves.

### **Perpetrators**

A total of 118 perpetrators were reported. Concerning 58% of these abusers (68) more information was given: 90% were male between ages 22 to 40 and 61 male and 7 female perpetrators were of German nationality. Most of them were the “father” or a “father figure” or had a close relationship to the family as a family friend.

**Strategies used by perpetrators** were “showing ‘emotional affection’, preference over others;” “pretending wrong sexual behaviour to be normal;” “presents, money;” “threats” were used to abuse children for CPE. “Modern slavery, trafficking” played no vital role.

*This seems to allow for the assumption that CPE takes place within close surroundings of the victims.*

### **What makes it difficult for victims to disclose CPE or online victimization?**

- “Guilt”
- “Fear of the threats of the abuser”
- Assumption that maybe suggestions the victim might have made during counseling/therapy were not interpreted rightly by the professional.

### **What enables victims to disclose?**

If professionals let them know that THEY know about CPE as well as a trusting relationship and patience.

Disclosure was being accompanied by feelings of shame, hate, disgust / loathing for both girls and boys. Girls would also show fear and denial. Boys would show guilt and speechlessness.

**Treatment offered to victims** is therapy, counselling, preparation and accompaniment to trial and pedagogic work. *Striking was the fact that diagnostic assessment was not of uttermost importance!*

Cases of CPE are cognitively as well as emotionally more challenging for the counsellor/therapist, whereas for the victims the issues regarding the abuse rather than the filming or picture taking are of more relevance.

Professionals usually avoided confronting victims of abuse with the possibility that abusive images had been taken and distributed. They believed such a confrontation could retraumatize the child and it would contradict the position of letting the victim set the pace as to what to disclose at which point in time. Some specialized counselling centres believed that their specialization considering sexual abuse would be enough to encourage disclosure – also disclosure of CPE.

The permanence of images leads to feelings of discomposure and powerlessness for counsellors/therapists. They assumed that victims would be just as challenged by it as soon as they would cognitively grasp the implication of permanence within the World Wide Web.

In order to cope with “permanence” some professionals would apply trauma-therapeutic measures. Others believed coping as in healing not to be possible considering permanence.

All reported cases of CPE had been part of a sexual abuse of a child within close familial or social surroundings.

Structures of organized crime (mafia) or internationally operating rings were rarely ever mentioned. It seems that victims of such organized crime hardly ever find any help within the German counselling/therapy services.

## **2. Online Grooming**

Sexualized behaviour is the continuum of sexualized behaviour in general. Meaning that the new media have become tools for sexualized assaults.

A study by Catarina Katzer and Detlef Fetchenhauer<sup>1</sup> found that 38.2 % adolescents are involuntarily being confronted with sexualized content. 25.9% were being asked about their looks; 26.3% asked about their own sexual experiences; 24% unwillingly were told sexual experiences by others; 11% received nude pictures; 4.6% received pornographic films and 8.6% were asked to commit sexual acts in front of a webcam.

Usually girls would be chatted up in sexualized ways or asked to commit sexual acts more often. On the other hand boys would receive more nude pictures or pornographic material online. Some of these victims had posted “interest in sexual activities” on their accounts, others had not.

54.5% had unpleasant feelings about these encounters, 40% were angry; 17.3% were frustrated; 14.9% were scared; 11.3% were depressed and 14.4% felt hurt.

Some would ward the offense off by “ignoring” the other or leaving the chat. Only very few victims – 8%!!! – Talk to adults about their experiences.

### **Strategies of online-offenders**

A study conducted by Janis Wolak, David Finkelhor and Kimberly Mitchell<sup>2</sup> concerning internet-initiated sex crimes against minors found the following:

76% of victims were 13 to 15 years old, 22% 17 years old and 75% of all victims were female.

99% of offenders were male. Almost all of the cases with male victims involved male offenders. The offenders were much older than their victims; 76% were age 26 or older; 47% were more than 20 years older than their victims.

76% of first encounters between offenders and victims happened in online chat

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<sup>1</sup> Aggression, Gewalt und sexuelle Belästigung in Chatrooms. Eine Untersuchung der Chat-Kommunikation Jugendlicher im Alter zwischen 10 und 19 Jahren. Catarina Katzer, Institut für Wirtschafts- und Sozialpsychologie, Köln 2005

<sup>2</sup> Janis Wolak, David Finkelhor, Kimberly Mitchell: Internet-initiated sex Crimes against Minors: Implications for Prevention Based on Findings from a National Study. 2003

rooms. Offenders who met victims online in venues other than chat rooms appeared to use profiles posted by victims.

Most offenders took time to develop relationships with victims. 64% communicated online with victims for more than 1 month. Most cases also evolved into multiple forms of contact, including more than one kind of online interaction. 79% included telephone conversations; 48% of offenders sent pictures online to victims; and 47% sent or offered gifts or money.

Investigators described victims in half of the cases as being in love with or having feelings of close friendship toward offenders.

Although most of the offenders were much older than their victims, deception about these large age differences was a rare feature of these crimes. Only 5% of offenders represented themselves online as peers of victims by claiming they were age 17 or younger. In some of these cases, the offenders started off saying they were teens, but later introduced that they were older. Another 25% of offenders shaved a few years off their true ages, but still presented themselves as much older than their young targets.

Deception about sexual motives was also uncommon. Although 21% of offenders hid or misrepresented their motives, most of these deceivers were open about wanting sex from their victims. According to respondent investigators, most misrepresentations involved insincere promises of love and romance. However, some cases involved more fundamental deceptions. A few offenders posed as “friends” and then assaulted their victims, and a small number devised more elaborate ploys, for example luring girls by claiming to run modelling or casting agencies. Nonetheless, most offenders openly sexually solicited victims. 80% brought up sexual topics during online communications with victims. 20% engaged in cybersex with victims, and 18% transmitted sexual pictures to victims online.

There were also other forms of deception and misrepresentation. Altogether, 52% lied about something at some point in the relationship, but deceptions about being considerably older adults interested in sexual relationships with teenagers did not occur in most of these crimes.

Most cases progressed to face-to-face sexual encounters.

74% involved face-to-face meetings and 93% of the face-to-face meetings entailed illegal sexual contact between offenders and victims.

In summary, most Internet-initiated sex crimes involved teenagers too young to consent to sexual intercourse that were described by respondents as in love with or close to the offenders they had met online. These were no forcible crimes, committed by men who were much older than their victims. The victims knew they were interacting with adults who were interested in them sexually. The length and variety of communications and multiple face-to-face meetings in most cases indicate that many victims viewed their interactions with much older adult offenders as desired relationships.

### **3. Peer-to-Peer assaults**

*A 14 year old falls in love in a local chat with a 15-year-old boy. They go together and also have sex with each other. Eventually he asks her whether she would be ok if his friends would be present while having sex. She consents. A 13 year old films them having sex with his cell phone. These films then are being sent to friends – something she also takes part in by sending the clip to her best friend (makes you wonder...). This way the film reaches friends, neighbours, schoolmates, etc. When the spreading increases even more, the girl fears punishment from her parents. So she tells her mother that she had been raped. The mother then turns to a youth centre in order to get help. There she is being told to report the rape to the police. A few days later the girl withdraws her accusation and everybody is at loss.*

*The co-workers of the youth centre are disconcerted. The action strategies with a case of rape are clear to them: keep calm, stabilize victims, and work with the parents, etc. and if possible report the case to the police. They acted accordingly. But now many questions arise: Was it real a rape? Above all, if the girl passed the pictures on and so in the long run puts herself into the line of fire – is she real a victim then?*

*Here we are confronted with „an unpopular and unexpected“ victim: adolescents, who are allegedly informed and seemingly consent. The girl in this case knew all In-*

*ternet rules like „never give your personal data, never meet someone you met online by yourself, etc.” Nevertheless the situation had escalated and she was utterly exposed to her peers. Girls would call her “deserving bitch” while boys thought – “well she wanted it, right?”*

*Another case: An 18-year-old man turns to Innocence. He tells that he had been tempted to undress and act sexually in front of a webcam. Then suddenly his MSN chat partner writes “there you go asshole – now look out for your film on Internet, ha-ha! “*

*In his panic the young man deletes the chat protocol and hides away. He constantly lives in fear, that the other would distribute his film. Weeks later he confesses do his girlfriend. I simply cannot understand why he did what he did. And all he wants is to forget all this ever happened.*

It seems that the new media entice adolescents (and adults for that matter) to forget about protecting themselves by protecting their privacy. Seemingly safe at home they tend to give away easily more information about themselves than they are aware of. Also it seems that online grooming follows a different set of rules and seems to have an almost greater impact on the adolescents.

Therefore it is particularly important to ask: „Would you act in such a way if you were in the same room with that person? Would you want to give someone, whom you just met on the bus, a picture of yourself to take home with him/her? And it is important to talk about sex with adolescents. They see so much, know about techniques, sites, etc. but they are also still confused and searching for their ways.

### **Demands:**

- Information about magnitude, form and number of reports concerning CPE and online solicitation,

- Information concerning diagnostics, symptoms of victims as well as how to help those victims,
- Information on how to confront a client with the possibility of CPE or online exposure within counselling/treatment,
- Information as to how the fact that images were being taken affect the victims – or how the fact of self-generated pictures affects them
- Information about perpetrators/abusers.
- Networking within the psychosocial treatment and care structures as well as police, justice and medical care, as well as regional, national and international networks are necessary!
- Create a prevention tools with children and adolescents
- Install popups, which will give links to help lines or online counselling
- Education about emotional as well as social consequences concerning peer violence via internet and cell phones by external experts
- Expand online counselling

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