

Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs

HEARING

Combating sexual abuse, sexual exploitation of children and child pornography

Wednesday 29 September 2010, 9.00 – 12.30

**A victim's perspective
Actual given statement**

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I have been a psychologist for a long time and I have been working with victims for many years now. And missing in the debate so far is the view on the victims

So I will overturn my prepared statement and try to explain what this is all about and maybe answer some of the questions yesterday.

So let's assume, we have a little boy or a little girl – 6 years old – who is now going to elementary school. And let's assume this child had a course in kindergarten where he or she learnt to say „NO“ when someone touches him or her indecently. The child is a happy little camper. The parents both work and don't have much time for him or her. Now let's assume in the neighbourhood there is this man called John. And John really starts to take care. The parents are really relieved. They have a great babysitter and he is taking care of that child.

Eventually John starts to touch that little child and the child has a problem. There is this great guy my parents really like. So, who am I going to tell? Even if I tell my mother because I don't want him to do that, she cannot really imagine what I am trying to say and I am ashamed.

So John goes on. And he starts abusing that little child. And he abuses that little child maybe orally. And the hurt and the shame rise and the parents don't really understand. The fact is, that little child likes John, because John really takes care. He or

she just wants John to stop what he is doing when he is hurting that child, but that is really difficult to tell.

So the children give off some signs – they give hints saying this and that – but nobody understands because nobody can imagine that in my family or in my immediate surroundings there are abusers. And if we apply statistics that probably in this room we will have some unidentified victims as well as some unidentified perpetrators. And that is something we do not want to recognize.

So then eventually that child realizes – the abuse is still going on, the child is growing older and children do have a way of coping – John is taking pictures and he is making movies. That makes things even more difficult because now John is blackmailing by saying: “You know what? If you want to tell, I will show them that movie and that movie will show that you wanted it! And nobody will believe you!”

My point is: If we as adults do not take care of the children and if we as adults do not start to realize what we are talking about – if we do not realize that people in our immediate surroundings are doing what they want with children, because we are not paying enough attention it is not going to change. Because this little child might say “NO” to John, but he will just not listen.

So children need adults who will listen. And if these abusive images are then being distributed through the Internet or p2p-networks, that makes it even more difficult for the children because now the shame becomes utterly public. My worst shame, my worst hour, my worst fear becomes public. And I have no control over who will see what happened to me, when I was six years old.

And even, to be quite honest, even by deleting these sites we can never be sure that this material will not re-enter the internet or peer2peer networks, because we do not know who is hosting what on their computers and who is sharing what with whom. The same applies to online-grooming. If I am an adolescent and I am having a tough time with my parents – because that’s what adolescence is all about. It’s about having a tough time for parents as well as adolescents.

So I meet this great guy online. And he is not even lying so much. Maybe he is 40 pretending to be 30, which is not such a big deal. Maybe he won’t tell me, that he is married and has 3 children. What he will do online is exactly what John did offline. He will strike up a relationship with me. And he will move up my boundaries and he will confront me with things that I don’t want to be confronted with. BUT I have no idea how to deal with that because I am completely overwhelmed.

I learnt, I am supposed to tell my parents. But how am I supposed to tell my parents or even my teacher, that I have this guy who I have been chatting with for the past three months. Who is chatting me up in a sexualized way, who is blackmailing me into undressing in front of a webcam, masturbating and who is then saying: “You know what? If you tell anybody, I will distribute these pictures and nobody will believe you.” I have a great problem. And if my surroundings don’t realize, that it’s not my fault, because with 12 years of age – even if I am vocal, intelligent, strong willed – I am nothing up against a perpetrator who is setting out to sexually abuse me.

We have to realize that the shift in power is always in favour for the adults who are setting out to sexually abuse children.

Another little side remark: Something we are not really want to talk about at all. But it does happen and we don't want to know, because every woman is a potential mother and every mother is a potentially good mother. So there is a myth we really have to take into account because that makes it even more difficult for victims to disclose.

So, saying we need more prevention – yes, I completely agree. But this prevention will go nowhere if we do not take into account the adults who have to take care of children. We need to teach them and we need to put them into a mode of thinking that will allow them – not to panic – but to take the right steps when suspicions of sexual abuse arise. Because most of the times, now let's be honest – if this is my brother we are talking about, I don't want to imagine my brother being a perpetrator. I rather not think about it. But if I have a child telling me, I don't want to be with him, I need to be able to go through the necessary steps in order to find out what is going on.

In Germany we had 11,961 reported cases of child sexual abuse in 2009. That is a drop down in figures. But even that figure means, we are talking about 32 children being sexually abused – officially reported – every single day in Germany in 2009. And these are only the cases that have been officially reported to the police. I hope you understand why it is so difficult for children to even disclose sexual abuse. And it is even more difficult to report it to the police. So the real numbers we don't know and we will never know.

But if don't start acting now and if we don't start harmonizing our laws and if we don't start to take into consideration of what we know today and if we don't take every measure that needs to be taken in order to protect children today and in the future, then we really should be utterly ashamed of ourselves and not longer pretend our children are our future, because we are not really taking care of them.

There are great children out there, who have great supportive surroundings but there is also a high percentage of children out there who don't have people to turn to. And these children we need to reach out to and these children we need to take extra responsibility for. That's why "Innocence in Danger" highly, highly appreciates the Directive and all the measures proposed in that Directive. There are still details that needs to be worked out, but if that Directive is not going through I say, we should all go home and tell our children, we didn't do our job very well today.

Thank you very much!

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