

Victimisation by means of digital technology: New challenges for the treatment of victims

Julia von Weiler
Psychologist / CEO
Innocence in Danger e.V. Germany

6th International Summer Conference

Research in Forensic Psychiatry

Regensburg, July 2nd – 3rd, 2010



Innocence in Danger

- International movement against child sexual abuse with a special focus on distribution of child abusive images via internet and the risk digital media pose to children and adolescents today.
- Founded 1999 by Hodayra Sellier in Paris, Innocence in Danger today has offices in France, Switzerland, the United States, Morocco, Columbia and Germany.
- The German chapter took up its work in 2003.



Innocence in Danger e.V. Germany

- From 2004 until 2007 Innocence Germany conducted a study on how child and adolescent victims of child-pornographic-exploitation are being cared for in Germany.
- 2005 Innocence in Danger e.V. together with another NGO founded a nationwide infoline against child sexual abuse in Germany.
- 2008 – 2010 prevention model scheme on internet with adolescents concerning internet safety
- Etc.

Innocence in Danger Germany

Networking

- Member of eNACSO (European NGO Alliance for Child Safety Online thematic network), author of the brochure “The right click”.
- Part of an EU research, funded by Safer Internet: ROBERT (Risktaking Online Behaviour Empowerment through Research and Training) along with the Council of the Baltic Sea States, Save the Children Denmark and Italy, Stellit International, Edinburgh University, Linköping University and Tartu University.

Aim of this research is to better understand victimization as well as delinquent behaviour in order to enhance prevention programs as well as intervention programs.

Innocence in Danger Networking

In Germany we are part of

- the alliance “White IT” run by the minister of interior of Lower Saxony as well as
- the “BundLänder AG,” a monitoring group run by the federal ministry of family affairs.
- Etc.

Online Victims

- Victims who have been or who are being abused within their social surroundings and whose images are being distributed by means of digital media.
- Victims who are groomed online and are later abused offline.
- Victims who are groomed online and abused online.

How many images are out there?

- It is very difficult to get hard figures of abusive images spread.
- 1998 the Child Victim Identification Program (NCMEC) accounted for 100.000 child sexual abusive images. By the beginning of 2009 this number had risen up to 23 Million images!
- As of last year ChildBase (CEOP) held 807,525 unique images.

How many images are out there?

"The demographics of child sexual abuse images remain an incomplete science since the majority of confirmed images are of prepubescent children. Those boys and girls with incomplete sexual maturation but who have started pubertal development constitute a potential significant number of victims who are not accounted for in this aspect of child abuse surveillance. The reasons for this discrepancy rest upon the fact that the majority of analysts who monitor images on the Internet feel most comfortable in determining that an image is consistent with a child, when there is no evidence of sexual maturation at all" (Cooper, 2009).

How many images are out there?

This is important as our estimates of the number of images is at best a very conservative guess, and a guess which is likely to exclude anyone showing any sexual maturation

German Study

Innocence in Danger Germany

- From 2004 until 2007 we conducted an empirical study concerning the care and treatment of victims of child pornographic exploitation (CPE) in Germany.
- Contacting all specialized institutions nationwide dealing with sexually abused children and distributing questionnaires as well as conducting in depth interviews.

in print „Journal of Sexual Aggression“

Cases

- 245 cases of child pornographic exploitation (197 girls, 48 boys – aged between 6 to 14) as well as
- 280 suspected cases of child pornographic exploitation were identified for the reporting period from 2000 until 2005.
- 84% of all professionals stated however, that they had not been confronted with any such cases.

Disclosure

Counsellors stated that

- “guilt” as well as
- “fear of the abuser” made it difficult to disclose picture taking.
- They also assumed that maybe they did not interpret suggestions the victim might have made during counselling/therapy rightly.

Types of abusive images

seen most by counsellors/therapists included

- sexual acts between child/adolescent and adults,
- touching of genitals,
- vaginal abuse,
- oral abuse,
- posing for nude pictures and photographing/filming of genitals.

Distribution of images

Distribution via internet was something counsellors and therapists were very insecure about. But we have to take into consideration that times have changed since 2005!

Perpetrators

Most of the perpetrators were the “father” or a “father figure” or had a close relationship to the family as a family friend.

Perpetrators used strategies of “showing ‘emotional affection’ as well as preferring the child over another;” “pretending wrong sexual behaviour to be normal.” They made presents and paid money” and/or threatened the child.

This seemed to allow for the assumption that child pornographic exploitation takes place within close (offline) surroundings of the victims.

Treatment offered

Counsellors and Therapists mostly offered

- therapy and counselling for victims and/or
- aided through the process of a trial and/or
- offered pedagogic group work.

Striking was the fact that diagnostic assessment was applied regularly in cases!

Complexity

- Counsellors and therapists reported that cases involving child abusive images were more complex than offline abuse, more demanding and raised many questions about professional involvement.
- They experienced these cases to be cognitively as well as emotionally more challenging for them.
- They also thought however, that for victims issues regarding the abuse rather than the filming or picture taking were of more relevance.

Complexity

- Dr. Sharon Cooper: “The distribution of child sex abuse images means there can be one victim and many offenders. The fact that these images are spread and downloaded by others leads to heightened symptoms of post traumatic stress disorder, depression and or anxiety, plus a diagnosis so far not commonly seen in child sex abuse cases – paranoia.”
- We need to find a better name for it, because these victims have every reason to be afraid that their images are seen by others, maybe people in their close surroundings.

What does victimization mean?

- We need to understand that these images are around FOR EVER.
- Meaning that victims have to find new ways of coping and we need to help them in doing so.

Online Grooming and Self Generated Images

- Offenders target children and adolescents online, groom them online which leads to so called “self generated” sexualized images of the victim as well as contact offences.
- Adolescents are also using digital media in order to present themselves in problematic sexualized ways or themselves grooming others into generating sexualized images or contact offences.

Images change everything

- Does it seem I complied (offline abuse images distributed online).
- I am responsible, nobody will believe I was somehow forced or manipulated into taking these images (online grooming leading to self-generated images).
- Who will see these images? What will friends and family think?

Images change everything

- Who are the perpetrators looking at the images?
- People will look at these images in order to get sexually aroused and masturbate.
- I was abused once but it continues on endlessly.
- ...

Article by a therapist dealing with case descriptions dealing concerning these questions will be published in the „Journal of Sexual Aggression“

Therapy and Counselling

- have to deal with the fact that child abusive images are physical proof of the horror children and adolescents had to endure.
- Regarding trauma therapy this physical evidence might question its efficiency or traditional appliance maybe more than we are willing to admit.
- This in turn means we have to find new ways of caring for these victims, learn with them what is needed and come up with maybe even unorthodox methods in reaching out to them.

Delinquents

We need to understand that these delinquents do NOT all suffer from paedophilia. Meaning that many offenders act because they can, because they seize the opportunity and because they like to impose (sexual) power over children and adolescents.

What needs to be done?

Identifying all above mentioned types of online victims and providing them with adequate care.

- In order to do that we need to train counsellors and therapists maybe even by generating a European or International curriculum which then will be applied in the respective countries.

What needs to be done?

Online counselling – as a first step to getting help is also needed.

- A study conducted by Catarina Katzer, University of Cologne showed that only 8% of those adolescents who have been sexually harassed online will turn to an adult for help. Online counselling will make this step much easier and might then lead them into “face to face” sessions.

What needs to be done?

Treatment programs for delinquents

- It is necessary to provide adequate treatment programs for delinquents which will also address online grooming and online abuse of children. By doing so we will also learn more about their behaviour which in turn can be put to use for prevention as well as intervention programs for victims.

What needs to be done?

Prevention

- We need adequate programs to reach out to children, adolescents, care takers and educators with prevention programs in order to make them understand risks as well as safety measures to be taken.

What needs to be done?

Research

- concerning online grooming leading to online or offline abuse as well as concerning the distribution of images. Only by doing so we will be able to understand mechanisms which in turn will be put to use for treatment of victims, treatment of delinquents and prevention programs. ROBERT is setting out to do a first step in exactly that direction.

What needs to be done?

Overall it is high time to join forces and efforts and take a step forward instead of having the “wheel reinvented” all over the place!

Thank you for your attention!

Innocence
in danger



Grolmanstrasse 59

50825 Köln

Tel.: 0221 – 58 98 786

Mail: info@innocenceindanger.de

www.innocenceindanger.de