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Identifying vulnerable children online and what strategies can help them

Report

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IDENTIFYING VULNERABLE CHILDREN ONLINE AND WHAT STRATEGIES CAN HELP THEM

Report of a seminar arranged by the UKCCIS Evidence Group

on 24th January, 2012

March, 2012

Acknowledgements

This report has been produced by Professor Sonia Livingstone (London School of Economics) and Tink Palmer (CEO, Marie Collins Foundation). The contents are based on speakers' powerpoint presentations and the seminar notes taken by members of the UKCCIS Secretariat and Yinhan Wang (PhD student, LSE). The seminar was audio-recorded purely to assist with the accurate collation of information. The audio files have, upon completion of this report, been deleted.

Permissions to reproduce relevant slides from presentations for the purpose of this report have been given by all the presenters.

We would like to thank the Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre for hosting the event, the UK Council for Child internet Safety (UKCCIS) secretariat for assisting in the organisation of this seminar and for taking relevant notes throughout the day and Yinhan Wang for assimilating the content of the day into a draft report.

Finally, our thanks to seminar participants - presenters, panellists and audience - for their insightful contributions and sharing of expertise.

For more on the work of the UKCCIS Evidence Group, see
http://www.saferinternet.org.uk/research/ukccis-evidence-group

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Executive summary

Introduction

For the past two years the UKCCIS Executive Board has recognised the need to gain a clearer picture of which children are likely to be vulnerable online. Ensuring that all children can use the internet safely and without coming to any harm is the guiding principle behind this endeavour.

In 2010 a paper, co-authored by Tink Palmer (Marie Collins Foundation) Zoe Hilton (then working for the NSPCC- now working for CEOP) and Richard Piggin (Beatbullying) entitled "Identifying vulnerability online" was submitted to the Board. The authors noted that "whilst the Byron Review mentions vulnerability online, there is no attempt to define what that might mean. This is not a criticism but an indicator of the complexity of identifying what leads to children being vulnerable online and the current paucity of research on this issue."

While the supposition that those children deemed as vulnerable offline are more likely to be vulnerable online may have some credence, it is vital to take into account a number of other factors which contextualise when, why and how children may be at risk online. The four Cs for potential risks facing children – namely contact, content, conduct and commercialism – come into play at different stages of a child's development and thus vulnerability is not a static issue but one that needs contextualising within the emotional, psychological and physical developmental stages of childhood.

The Executive Board formed the view that further discussion needed to take place and that this should be informed by research and practice experience and wisdom. The UKCCIS Evidence Group took up the challenge and the outcome was a seminar held on the 24th January, 2012 of which this report offers the key findings.

Purpose of the seminar

The purpose of the seminar was twofold. Firstly, it aimed to provide a forum to bring together the latest research regarding vulnerability online, both from academic researchers and also including the practice findings and experience of those working with children who have been harmed online and the views of internet service providers in order to better inform policy and practice guidance. The focus was to identify which children are likely to be more vulnerable online in order to provide an evidence base to underpin the development of sound harm-prevention policies for children's internet use.

The second purpose was to identify how, on the basis of available evidence, to take matters forward in order that we might develop a cohesive national

response to vulnerability online and target our resources accordingly.

The seminar format

We decided to approach the issue of children's vulnerability online from as broad a spectrum as possible so that we might better understand the nature of the issues from diverse perspectives. Following a scene-setting overview of the field, the seminar was divided into four sessions focused on common questions. The day concluded with an open discussion, facilitated by a panel, to enable all attendees to share their expertise.

The questions posed to the contributors were as follows

- **Research findings**
    - Which children are vulnerable?
    - Are vulnerable children all vulnerable in the same or different ways?
    - Who takes advantage of their vulnerability?
    - What does the evidence base show or not show?
- **Practice findings**
    - Which children are vulnerable? What are findings and lessons from clinical practice?
    - How can recovery services help?
    - What research studies need to take lace to build up an evidence base?
- **Children with special needs and children with disabilities**
    - Are the risks different for children with special needs or disabilities?
    - Are some children with special needs or disabilities more vulnerable than others?
    - Who takes advantage of their vulnerability?
- **Panel discussion**
    - What does the evidence tell us about
        - Strategies, solutions, policy and practice implications?
        - Prioritising: who are most at risk?
    - What are the next steps we need to take to ensure children's safety online?

The content

The following is a compilation of key findings from the presentations that have relevance to the questions the presenters were asked to address. More detail is available in the main body of the text of this report where the contributors' powerpoint presentations have been included. Many points were made during

the panel discussion at the end of the seminar and these are recorded at the end of this report.

1. Setting the scene

- Vulnerability online needs to be understood in the broader context of children's lives – focus on building protective environments
- Protection can only be achieved through recognition of the global nature of the problem
- There are many unresolved questions still to address – eg implications for children with disabilities, impact of cultural context on behaviour, risk, aspiration, vulnerability, young abusers, impact of pornography – both solicited and unsolicited, risk/resilience factors leading to sexual abuse and exploitation, what works in reducing harm/risk

2. Research Findings

- **Findings from the CCfCP study - of 166 cases of children groomed online**
  - 8 cases made reference to some form of vulnerability

- **Interim findings from the ROBERT study**
  - Children groomed online felt that nobody asked them "the right questions" whilst it was happening that might have protected them
  - Children groomed online stated that they had wanted things to be different

- **Findings from the EC online groomers study**
  - Mean age of victim 13-14, predominantly female
  - Three categories of children – resilient (majority) - least likely to interact and low risk of meeting, disinhibited – willing to interact but unlikely to meet and vulnerable (minority) – willing to interact, seeking relationships and a high risk of meeting

- **Findings from the EU Kids Online study**
  - Children whose parents lack education or internet experience tend to lack digital safety skills and parental support online, leaving them vulnerable to online risk
  - Children with psychological difficulties tend to encounter more online risk, and to be more upset by it, compared with other children
  - Disabled children tend to have more digital skills but encounter more online risk and may lack peer support
  - Minority children also have more skills yet encounter more risk, and their parents wish to help them more

- **Findings from sexting research 2010/11 – 1,150 participants aged 9-11 years old**
    - 38% have friends who have sexted
    - 13% say it happens all the time
    - 56% were aware of distribution to other people
    - 70% would turn to friends if they got into trouble
    - 38% see nothing "inappropriate" about a topless image
    - 14% see nothing "inappropriate" about naked images

3. Practice Findings

- **Vulnerability and suicide contagion**
    - Use of chatrooms in spreading the contagion
    - 8 young people involved – all in the same adolescent unit at one time
    - Two completed suicide, four attempted suicide and a fear of this spreading through social media
    - Lack of understanding on the part of nursing staff regarding information given to them by patients about their online activities
    - Therefore, risks may go undetected
    - When is it harmful and when is it helpful for young people with such issues to be involved in online social networks specific to their issues
    - The new technology facilitates the speed and transmission of contagion
    - Those patients likely to be most vulnerable are those with
        - Attachment disorders
        - Developmental disorders
        - Physical and mental disorders
    - Need to
        - Increase digital literacy in healthcare workers
        - Set up a forum to share knowledge and skills
        - Identify patterns of use in identified groups
        - Research into the mechanism of contagion online

- **Children groomed online for sexual abuse online or offline – 22 boy and girl victims**
    - None told anyone – their abuse was 'discovered'
    - Formed online relationships with offenders when 12/13 years old
    - Age when abuse was discovered = 14/15 years
    - Very few presented with a history of troubled back grounds or could be deemed as vulnerable offline

- **Young people affected by adult pornography**
  - Mainly boys
  - Starts around the age of 11-12 years
  - Results in intimacy deficits, unrealistic expectations of their partners, inability to show empathy, relationship breakdown
  - Increasing number of referrals over the past 10 to 15 years

- **Children made the subjects of abusive images**
  - Can happen at any age, but more images of younger children are currently coming to light
  - The making of abusive images is an offline phenomenon – it happens in homes in our communities
  - Data from NCMEC reveals that of the 3,358 victims that had been traced up to December 2010, 66% of the people who took the abusive photographs were known to the child victim

- **Which children are vulnerable online?**
  - Vulnerability to grooming, impacts of adult pornography and displaying risky and/or harmful behaviours online currently appears to be less about being seen as a vulnerable child off-line and more about the stage of development of the child – namely pubescent – starting around 11 to 12 years of age.
  - From practice findings, for many of these child victims, there are few common indicators of vulnerability.
  - The impact of these abusive behaviours on child victims, however, appears to be universal.
  - Vulnerability to being made the subjects of abusive images may affect children of any age, sex and ethnicity – little is known about the demographics of these children.
  - More evidence is available from one or two sources regarding who these children are at risk from – the majority being people known to them.
  - The making of abusive images is an offline crime and mirrors what we already know about who are the principle sexual abusers of children – those known to them.

- **Virtual Violence: Protecting Children from Cyberbullying, 2009 report from a survey of 2000 children**
  - There are no absolutes regarding vulnerability online
  - One third of 11-16 year olds had been targeted, threatened or humiliated online
  - 5% reported cyberbullying as an ongoing experience
  - Children with special educational needs were 16 times more likely to be the subjects of persistent bullying

- Pupils receiving free meals were 13% more likely to be bullied
- White, non-British ethnic background and females reported a higher incidence of persistent online bullying

- **Virtual Violence II: Progress and Challenges in the fight against Bullying Report 2012 – from a survey of over 4,500 children**
  - Children with special educational needs are 18% more likely to be bullied over a prolonged period of time
  - Children who looked after a family member who has a disability or illness were 13% more likely to be cyber bullied
  - Children receiving free school meals were 3% more likely to be cyber bullied

4. Children with special needs or disabilities

- **Munch Poke Ping: Vulnerable, excluded young people and their confidence in using social media**
  - What can make these children vulnerable online?
    - Low self-confidence. Identity seen to be part of 'outsiders'
    - Fluid learning environment and gaps in education and induction
    - Experience abusive relationships or environments including anger
    - Influences of alcohol, drugs and gang culture. They are both risk takers and at risk
    - More unsupervised time, fewer structures and boundaries
    - Lack of supportive adults in their lives

- **Children and young people with disabilities and their online safety – a commentary on what research currently exists**
  - Very few broad studies have been carried out in the area of access and usage and online safety
  - There are some studies focusing on more niche areas – e.g. risk in identity negotiation, using assistive techniques
  - More work is needed to be able to answer the questions posed by the agency

Analysis

It should be clear that there is no single or simple definition of vulnerability to be obtained. Rather, many factors combine to render some children vulnerable to online risk, under particular circumstances, and with diverse consequences. In this seminar, we have gained good evidence that children's vulnerabilities online may be related to the nature of the online services they

use, the contacts they make, the content that they view, their own risky behaviours and the commercialism they encounter. However, we still lack a thorough understanding of when, why and how children become vulnerable. In addition, though it is apparent that certain groups of children identified as vulnerable offline will be vulnerable online, this isn't always the case. From the evidence shared at the seminar it would seem that the stage of development of children and young people is also a significant factor pertaining to vulnerability online – especially children entering the pubescent stage of their development.

Further work needs to be carried out on developing a holistic model/matrix that outlines what children are vulnerable from, how they become vulnerable, why they do so and when this is most likely to happen within their childhood. By developing an evidence-based model, we will be in a better position to make informed prevention policies and to prioritise resources.

Looking to the future

To ensure that we do not lose the impetus that has been developed through the work carried out at the seminar, it is proposed that the UKCCIS Executive Board establishes a new workstrand to take these issues forward. This group would be able to call on experts for their knowledge on specific aspects, to contribute to a holistic model for predicting vulnerability, and to develop professional guidance and timely interventions to prevent harm. Ideally, it would work across the sectors of education, social work, health, clinical practice, child safeguarding and law enforcement. The purpose would be to derive evidence-based guidance regarding specific categories of vulnerable children in order to embed these in the professional practice of those who work with children so that, in future, the possible online/mobile aspects of vulnerability are recognised and addressed effectively.

Introduction

Tink Palmer, CEO, The Marie Collins Foundation

Over the past ten years there has been a growing recognition amongst professionals involved in the safeguarding of children online that there needs to be a deeper and more informed understanding of why some children are more vulnerable to harm online than others.

An initial presumption has been that if a child is deemed to belong to a vulnerable group offline then the quid pro quo must be that he or she will be vulnerable online. Experience has taught us that in some case this may be the case, but not in all.

Similarly, experience has also taught us that children who present no indicators of vulnerability offline, may be vulnerable and even, at times, seriously at risk of harm online.

Such a state of affairs lead to the UKCCIS Executive Board expressing a wish to gain a greater understanding of the issues pertaining to children's online activities in relation to the risks and the harms they may encounter. In 2010, an initial paper was presented to the Board outlining the issues regarding vulnerability online and there was agreement that further work needed to be carried out.

It is acknowledged that the content of this seminar does not cover every aspect of vulnerability nor the issues that surround it, but it is the start of a serious debate that we hope will serve as a springboard for further developments.

It is planned that this initiative is taken forward with the aim of producing sound policies and practice guidance that are informed by research and evidence based practice, in order to better prevent harm to children online.

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Setting the scene

Global Safety Online: Global challenges and strategies – findings from the UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre report

Gerison Lansdown
Independent Consultant on child rights and child participation

Rationale for and scope of study

- To assess of scale and nature of sexual abuse online, who is at risk and who are the perpetrators
- To review of children and young people's behaviour online, their understanding of risk, and the degree of risk and harm they experience
- To analyse the response to the problem by the international community and national governments
- To identify potential strategies for addressing the issue

Social and cultural context

- Changing potential of parents to manage and transmit culture and values
- Heightened protection in physical world versus cyber autonomy
- Contradictory messages – greater fears of adults sexual threats towards children yet increasingly sexualised worlds of children
- New technologies are commonly accompanied by fear
- Growing recognition that children are active agents constructing their own environments – implications for protection

Children's rights as a framework for analysis

- We need a holistic rights based approach to analysis and strategic intervention.
- Children have rights to: information; freedom of expression; active engagement and participation; education; play, recreation, leisure, cultural and artistic activity; non-discrimination; protection from violence and exploitation; promotion of best interests.
- Do participation and engagement, access to information, freedom of expression exist in tension with protection from violence and abuse, best interests? Or can they be seen as mutually reinforcing?

Key lessons and emerging issues

- Social implications of cyberspace
- Nature of abuse and exploitation online
- Risk and harm
- Difference between children

Social implications of cyberspace

- Children and young people are adopting, transforming, creating and transmitting new cultural forms in the online environment.
- The Internet, together with the mobile phone, has changed the pattern of social relationships, their construction, negotiation and scope
- Changed concept of friendship
- New boundaries of privacy – lack of warning signs that exist in the physical world.
- Capacity to form, change and create multiple identities - but once created identities exist in perpetuity – cyberspace allows for a complex mix of anonymity, self-promotion, role-playing.

Nature of abuse and exploitation online

- Children have always been exposed to sexual abuse and exploitation.
- The change is the opportunity, scale, scope, and potential impact of that abuse.
- The children who experience harm online fall broadly into three clusters:
  - Children exploited by caregivers
  - Children pro-active online
  - Children bullied online
- Pornography has become easily accessible, in more graphic forms, and is often unsolicited.

Understanding risk and harm

- Definitions of risk by adults and children are often very different.
- Important to differentiate risk and harm.
- Nature and patterns of online activity are broadly similar across different regions of the world – developmental rather than culturally determined behaviours.
- Implications of changing patterns of usage from fixed to mobile technology.

What protects children?

- Peers and friendship networks
- Engaged and supportive parents
- Parents who are themselves online
- Accessible sources of age appropriate information
- Access to relevant authorities: mainly in developed world where children have been provided with appropriate information.

Children are not a homogeneous group

- Little is known about the differing behaviours of different groups of children, the risks they may take and the impact the Internet may have on them.
- Children's use of the Internet, behaviour online and vulnerabilities within the online environment are different at different ages.
- The risks associated with the online environment are different in developing and developed countries due to differences in socio-

economic status of children and their families.

- The cultural environment in which children are living informs their understanding of accepted and expected behaviours.

Emerging implications for children in developing countries

- Connectivity rapidly extending to developing countries
- Access more likely in Internet cafes – risk implications
- Greater gulf between parents and children in ICT capacity
- Weaker regulatory controls
- Poverty a potential driver towards Internet exploitation
- Impact of pornography may be different in less sexualised cultures
- Some evidence of sexual contact via SNS as a route to social status

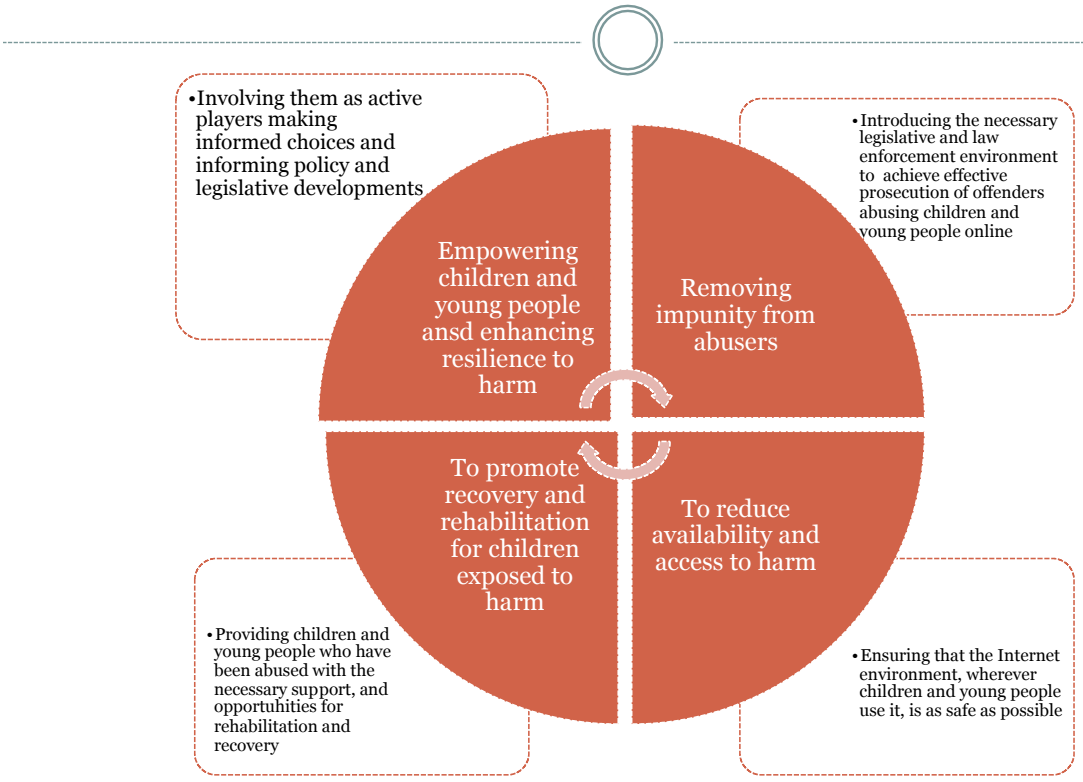


Figure: Potential strategies for building a protective environment

Concluding thoughts

- For most children, ICTs are a source of huge opportunity and extraordinary benefits – must not lose sight of the positives.
- Vulnerability online needs to be understood in the broader context of children's lives - focus on building protective environments.
- Protection can only be achieved through recognition of global nature of problem.
- Importance of a holistic rights based approach fulfilling, protecting and respecting all rights.
- Many unresolved questions still to address - eg implications for children with disabilities; impact of cultural context on behaviour, risk, aspiration, vulnerability; young abusers; impact of pornography – both

solicited and unsolicited; risk/resilience factors leading to sexual abuse and exploitation; what works in reducing risk/harm.

Section 1: Research findings

CHAIR: Dr Rachel O'Connell

Which children are vulnerable? Are vulnerable children all vulnerable in the same or different ways? Who takes advantage of their vulnerability? What does the evidence base show or not show?

1. Risk taking online behaviour – preliminary findings from the EU ROBERT Study

Ethel Quayle
COPINE Research, School of Health in Social Science, Edinburgh University

This study is taking place across seven European countries and aims to identify factors that make young people vulnerable online as well as those that offer protection.

Study one by the Canadian Centre for Child Protection finds that there are 268 confirmed reports of online luring (2007-11). In which there is a subset of 166 cases where additional text/chat logs are available, and provide information on the characteristics of reports, the characteristics of online activity, who made the reports, who the suspects were, and who the victims were.

The analysis of chat logs reveals that:

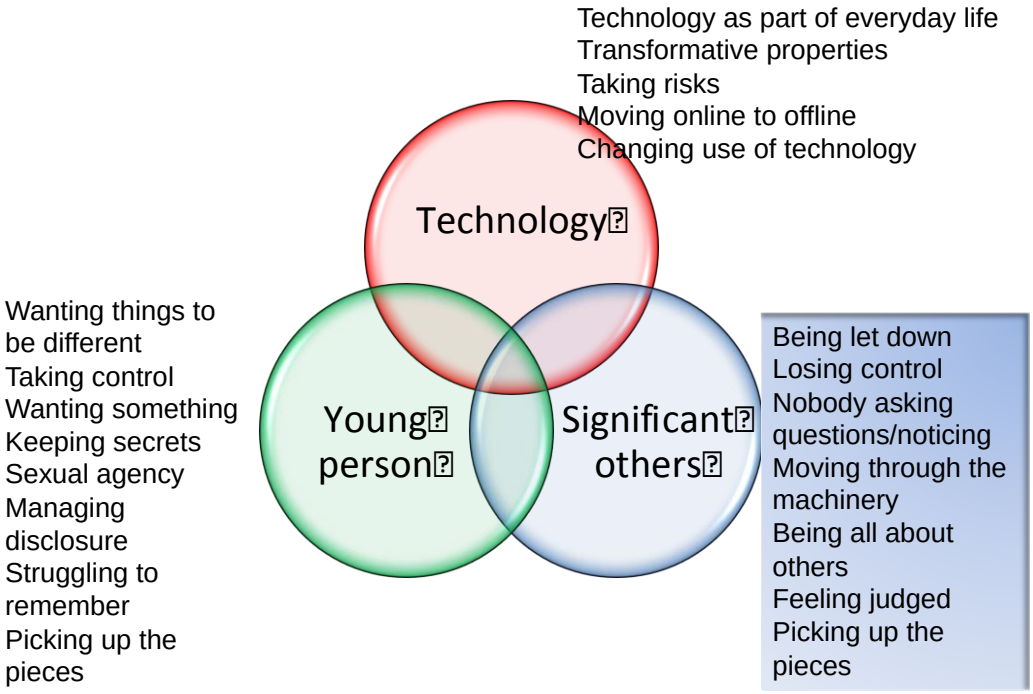
- In 93.4% of cases there were specific requests for pictures, or discussion of pictures already uploaded, that would be classified as child pornography.
- In 30% of cases the young person had sent images themselves to the suspect
- In 24.1% of cases the young person received threats form the suspect
- In 35.5% of cases the suspect sent a sexual photograph of themselves
- In 17% of cases there was movement from Internet related activity to the use of a cell phone
- Talk about meeting offline was seen in 33.7% of cases, although in only 13 cases did meetings take place
- In 9 cases there were offers of payment
- In only 11 cases was there clear evidence of deception
- 8 cases made reference to some specific vulnerability
- 32.5% of young people resisted the approaches of the suspect
- 1/3 of all cases included explicit demands to meet offline as well as

online for sexual activity, but the majority of cases involved demands for ‘cybersex’ only.

The ROBERT Project

Robert[1] (Risktaking Online Behaviour Empowerment through Research and Training) is a Knowledge Enhancement Project funded by the EU Safer Internet Programme (EUR 400000). It runs from June 2010 to June 2012, and is coordinated by the Expert Group for Cooperation on Children at Risk, Council of the Baltic Sea States. (www.childcentre.info/ROBERT)

The interviews with young people who had been subjected to grooming were conducted by trusted adults. There is a minimum of 30 children from different countries across Europe (UK, Denmark, Italy, Sweden, Germany, Russia). The report of the analysis of the interviews is in parallel with the research collection according to Grounded Theory methods. What has been revealed from the interviews to date is represented in the following:



[1] http://www.childcentre.info/robert/

2. Online grooming and the Targeting of Vulnerable Children: Findings from the EC Online Groomers Study

Julia Davidson
Centre for Abuse and Trauma Studies, Kingston University

This paper presents findings from the study conducted in 4 European countries (UK, Belgium, Norway and Italy). It suggest that offenders target children perceived from online interactions to be "vulnerable" or in need of adult attention.

The European Online Grooming Project[2] is the largest study of online grooming to date. The project took place from June 2009 to March 2012. It explores the ways sexual offenders approach, communicate and 'groom' children and young people for purposes of sexual abuse using the internet and mobile phone. The aim is to inform policy makers, front line professionals, teachers, carers and young people about how to effectively manage online risks.

Three interlinked phases:

- Scoping interviews with stakeholders (police officers & treatment providers), offender case-file & chat log analysis; development of theoretical model; literature review.
- In-depth interviews with convicted, incarcerated online groomers in the UK, Norway, & Belgium
- Focus groups with young people
- Workshops with parents and teachers (dissemination)

Who are the online groomers?

- Not a homogeneous group, majority met and abused victim.
- Mean offender age 38 , all male
- Mean victim age 13-14, predominantly female
- Where differ from other contact sex offenders:

- high IQ but not particularly high educational attainment
- IT competence seems to be primarily self-taught, via workplace, observing family and online research

- Using full range of ICT hardware, chatrooms, social networking sites, file-sharing sites and game platforms to contact young people

- *'I would spend lots of time on XBOX. Would play online and boys would talk to me'.*
- *Would move from XBOX to private messenger for security and privacy*

Offender – Depth interviews areas explored
We asked the offenders about how are young people selected for grooming,

[2] http://www.europeanonlinegroomingproject.com/

whether it is personal victim preference versus perceived vulnerability.

- which children are most vulnerable?
- what is the impact of language, age, location of computer and time of day online on selection of young people?
- how is the communication with young people conducted, managed and maintained?

Figure: Children on the internet: Response to groomers

Resilient	Risk Takers	Vulnerable
Recognise risk and fend off any approach they consider 'weird'. Appear to act on safety messages	Young people – seeking adventure, disinhibited, Less known about family risks. Open to 'blackmail' not to disclose because their own behaviour is used as evidence by groomer of cooperation or seduction.	High need for affection, attention, described as 'shy' Have difficult relationships with parents and difficult home lives, some looked after. Seeking 'love' on the internet. Believe they have a true relationship. Resist disclosure because want to continue the 'relationship'. Low self esteem

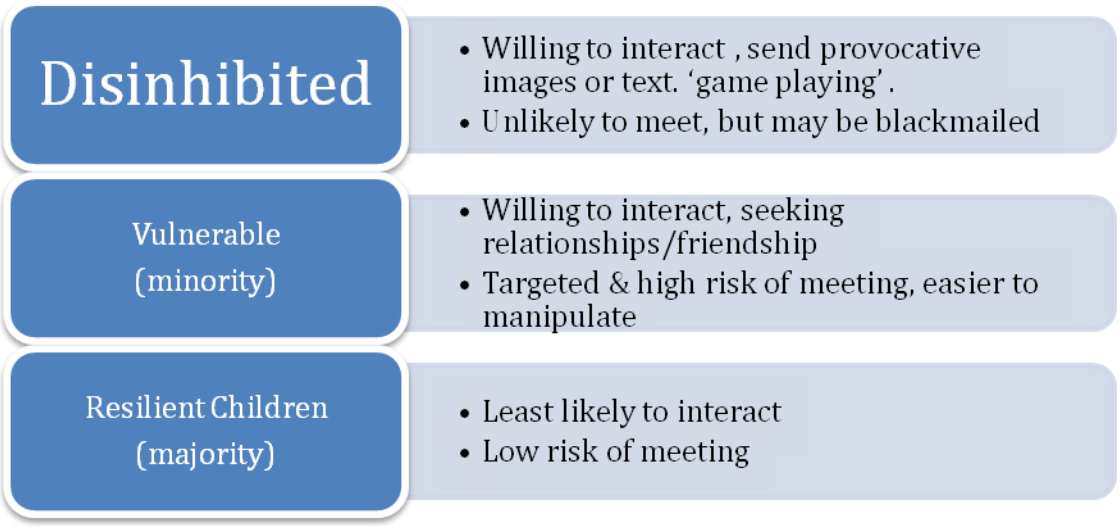
Risk-takers, disinhibited

- Victim disinhibition involved using sexual screen names; using sexual chat; populating adult chat rooms; sending explicit images of self
- *'one girl said, "would you like to see me naked?"'*
- *'Some girls sent me images without me asking'*
- *'She said "Hi I'm 16 and fancy chatting to a fifty-year old"'.*

Vulnerable victims – Offenders comments

- Majority who met identified as '*vulnerable' 'easily manipulated' 'Fishing trip'* on SNS to identify these children*:*
- *'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'*



3. Vulnerability and resilience: findings from EU Kids Online

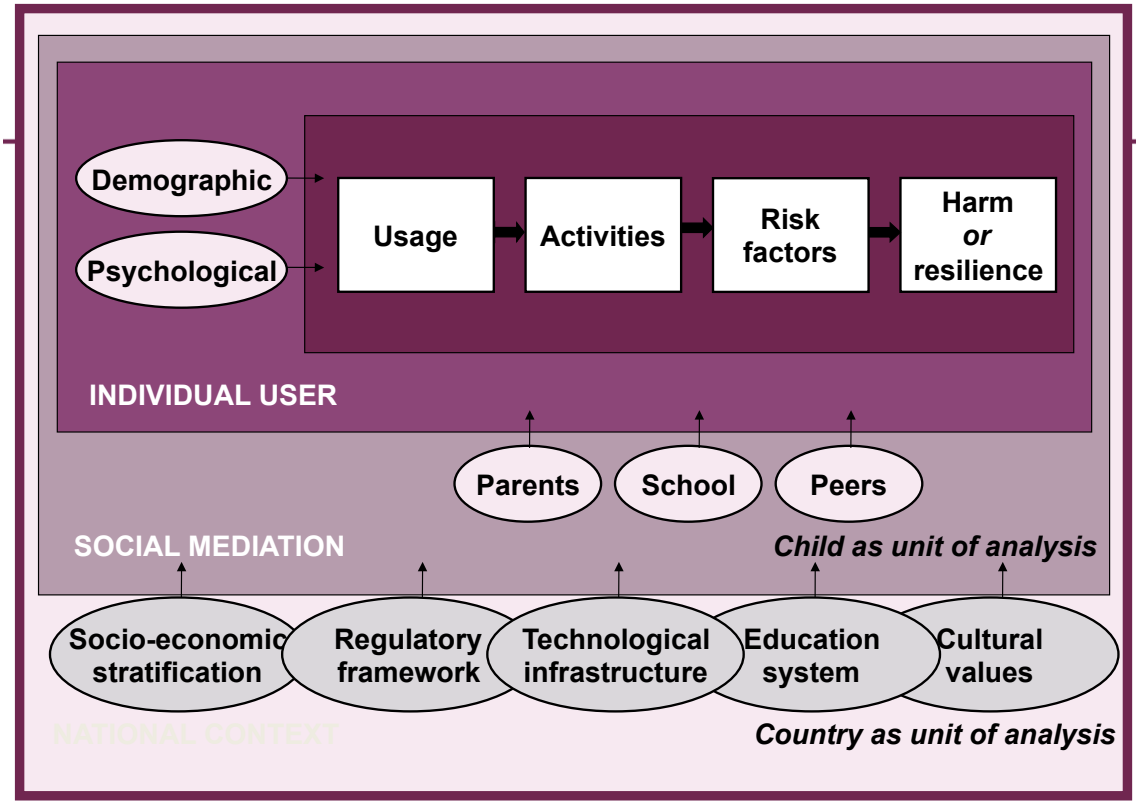
Sonia Livingstone
Director of EU Kids Online, LSE

EU Kids Online[3] networks 33 countries, funded by the EC Safer Internet Programme, in order to enhance knowledge of the experiences and practices of European children and parents regarding risky and safer use of the internet and new online technologies and so inform the promotion of a safer online environment for children

Surveying Europe

- Random stratified sample: ~ 1000 9-16 year old internet users per country; total of 25142 internet-users, 25 countries.
- Fieldwork conducted in spring/summer 2010; child + parent interviews at home, face to face. Questions were validated by cognitive/pilot testing; self-completion for sensitive questions; care with research ethics.
- The study is informed by national stakeholders and an international advisory panel.

Figure: Analytical framework:



[3] http://www2.lse.ac.uk/media@lse/research/EUKidsOnline/Home.aspx

Education/economic disadvantage
27% of children have parents with lower secondary education or less, and 25% have parents who do not use the internet:

- Fewer online risks but are more upset when they encounter risk
- Fewer digital literacy and safety skills than average
- Parents feel less confident in supporting their children online, and receive less safety information from a range of sources (including less from friends and family)
- Low educated are less likely to wish for more such information; non-users want info from the school
- If parents don't use the internet, children are less likely to turn to their parents when they experience something upsetting online

Psychological disadvantage
34% of children reported more psychological difficulties than most

- More online risks than average, and more upset by risks
- No less/more likely to tell anyone when they are upset online
- Digital skills are just below average
- Parents lack confidence in their ability to help their child online
- Parents more likely to have adjusted their approach after something upset their child online
- Parents neither receive nor want more safety information than average

Disability
6% of children have a mental, physical or other disability:

- Raised risk levels, especially in relation to contact risks
- More upset by meeting new online contacts offline, though not otherwise
- Digital skills a little higher than average
- Parents are less confident their child can cope with what they find online
- Less likely to tell a friend when they experience upsetting things online
- Parents get more safety information especially from ISPs and websites

Social disadvantage
4% of children belong to a discriminated-against group; 4% of children speak a minority language at home

- Average or above for online risk, more upset from bullying
- Digital skills are at or above average
- Parents tend to lack confidence in their and their child's ability to cope
- Parents more likely to have adjusted their approach in response to harm
- Parents think they should do more to support their child online
- Parents get less safety information from all sources, incl. friends/family

Conclusions
Vulnerable children are not all vulnerable in the same way:

- Children whose parents lack education or internet experience tend to

lack digital safety skills and parental support online, leaving them vulnerable to online risk

- Children with psychological difficulties tend to encounter more online risk, and to be more upset by it, compared with other children
- Disabled children tend to have more digital skills but encounter more online risk and may lack peer support
- Minority children also have more skills yet encounter more risk, and their parents wish to help them more
- The differences reported here are small; many unknown factors account for children's vulnerability online

4. Websex: what's the harm?

Andy Phippen
Professor of Social Responsibility in IT, Plymouth University

Following the recent BBC3 documentary[4] of the same name, Andy looks at the data behind the programme and implications for vulnerable groups, particularly in the light of the Simone Grice Inquiry in Cornwall.

Sexting research – 20010/11
Analysis responses from 30 schools, years 9-11, 1,150 participants in total. Administered in schools.

- 38% have friends who had "sexted"
- 13% say it happens all the time
- 56% were aware of distribution to other people in some cases
- Majority (70%) would turn to friends if they got into trouble.
- 38% see nothing "inappropriate" about a topless image, 14% say similar about a naked one.

Understanding "inappropriate"
Examples from children include: *"when they play with there virgina", "gayness"*, *"a picture of my nan"* or *"a naked guy in a banana suit, some sheep in a bath tub, somone eating them selfs, chicks with dick.com, two girls one cup, meat spin, lemon party, oh and adam penkala and tramps force fead poo."*

Help needed?
"i think you should because some of my mates send pic to boys they dont no and they meet up wiv them and they dont even no the boys i think it would be a good thing so people dont get hurt. because one day my mate might a boy and the boy might be someone diffrent and kidnap her or other bad stuff so yeah i think it would be a great idea to get more advice support and poctection for all people."

Websex – Preliminary results
950 self-selecting respondents – obtained through an online survey, dissemination via BBC
Older teens and young adults (16-24)

- 80% believe tech plays a positive role in their relationships
- 45% find it easier to interact online than in person
- 85% believe people can be more promiscuous online than offline
- 29% had engaged in explicit online activities below the age of consent (16% 15 or under). The youngest is aged 11.
- They are more likely to engage in explicit chat room interactions with a stranger than partner.
- 44% have met a stranger offline after an online introduction, and 28%

[4] http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b019gc2h

of those for “casual sex”

Implications

Most view technology as playing a positive role in formation and conduct of relationships. But there are areas of concern:

- Prevalence of “forwarding”
- The likelihood of meeting strangers following online introduction
- A distortion of what is “normal”

Section 2: Practice findings

CHAIR: Clive Michel, CEOP

Key questions: Which children are vulnerable? What are the findings and lessons from clinical practice? How can recovery services help? What research studies need to take place to build up an evidence base?

1. Vulnerability and contagion

Richard Graham
Clinical Director, Adolescent Directorate at the Tavistock and Portman NHS Foundation Trust

Following a case of suicide contagion in the summer of 2011, this presentation starts to address the recovery needs of those involved and the training needs of healthcare workers. What was striking in this case was that there was evidence the victim, who had been an inpatient just prior to the suicide episode, had been informing staff of her online activities, which included going to various chat rooms. Our sense was the nursing staff did not know what sense to make of the information about online activities.

Starting last year, NHS started promoting a digital literacy programme with health services. We are starting to form pathway to escalate concerns and safeguard approach when needed. By late spring, there was a contagion within the inpatients in a particular care service: 8 young people who had been inpatients in the same adolescent unit at one time, 2 had completed suicide, 4 others had attempted and there was a fear that it was spreading through social media. This did not spread through the mass media, but was confined within social network of very small group. It is complicated to fathom why some progressed with the contagion but not others.

Gaps in Awareness with health services

- Online activities and digital lives of the most vulnerable are not routinely explored. Risks may be undetected. However, it is a difficult and sensitive area to inquire, particularly with adolescents, for reasons such as plurality of the activities, and issues of embarrassment and shame about things that may be going on online.
- How do we know what online activity is harmful, and what is helpful, at least at the level of containment (e.g. ASH)?
- Who is vulnerable to contagion? Contagion is not a new phenomenon. But the technology does facilitate speed and transmission. Can content moderation mitigate against self-harm and eating disorders (access to methods)?

Areas of Vulnerability

- Attachment Disorders: reduced capacity for discrimination, greater impulsivity.
- Developmental disorders: Autistic Spectrum Disorders (social impairment).
- Physical and Mental Disorder: aim to reduce distress online, but engage in activities or processes that have adverse impact, such as self-harm and eating disorders.

Three Examples of Self-Harm

- 1) WoW player, threatened to jump from window when due to return to school. 2) Female adolescent with eating disorder difficulties, takes large overdose, after online criticism. 3) Female in-patient, part of a suicide pact group.
- Even though there are some similar, highly adverse factors, they don't necessarily predict the same behaviours.

Media Impact

- An anthropological experiment conducted in Fiji that examined media impact and how eating disorders processes are transmitted: Ethnic Fijian traditional aesthetic ideals reflect a preference for a robust body habitus, and they did not pursue thinness. Individual efforts to reshape the body by dieting or exercise thus traditionally have been discouraged.
- TV was introduced in 1995 to a remote part of Fiji (Nadroga). Key indicators of disordered eating were significantly more prevalent following exposure. Narrative data revealed subjects' interest in weight loss as a means of modelling themselves after television characters. Indirect media access through social networks may have greater impact.

Next Steps

- Increase digital literacy in healthcare workers, and increase knowledge of the digital lives of service users.
- Set up a forum to share knowledge and skills.
- Identify patterns of use in identified groups. For example, self-harm and eating disorders seem to be particularly vulnerable areas.
- Research into the mechanisms of contagion, and the roles of images, messaging and content.

2. Understanding when, why and how children are harmed online and how to assist in their recovery

Tink Palmer
CEO, The Marie Collins Foundation

The learning from working with child victims of online abuse forms part of the jigsaw for developing informed approaches to protecting children online. This presentation shares the findings from clinical practice about when, why and how children are harmed online, and how to assist their recovery.

Children groomed online for sexual abuse online and/or offline – girl victims

- Victims are most unlikely to report the abuse that had occurred
- Most say they would not have told anyone of the abuse had it not been discovered
- Five reasons for not telling
  - Highly sexualised nature of the language used by the young women,
  - Feelings of complicity
  - Lying about their age
  - Emotional dependency on online "boyfriend"
  - Fear of peer group and family responses to what they had done – NB "grooming"
- All gave minimal information on initial interview with police – many denied
- Talking in any detail about what happened is very difficult
- Shame, guilt, feeling conned, broken hearted
- Formed online relationships with the offenders when 12/13 years
- Age when abuse was discovered is 14/15 years
- Very few present with a history of troubled backgrounds
- Recovery is a long haul – role of family cannot be under-estimated

Boy victims

- Boys presenting as gay and bi-sexual
- Few facilities in the off-line environment for them – the internet is their refuge
- Aged 12 to13 when first encountered abusers
- Relief that there's someone else "like them"
- Eager and needy for relationships
- Multiple engagements with abusing men
- Reinforcement given through experiencing sex and a belief that their "friend/lover" understands them whereas their family and others around them don't
- Push-pull dynamic

- Maintaining consistent care and safeguarding of the child is time and personnel intensive
- This leads to a “splitting” of professional viewpoints regarding how the situation should be managed
- Continuity and consistency of key workers is essential – they can act as role models
- Start coming out of the abyss around 16/17 years

Young men affected by adult pornography

- Impacts on girls too: exhibitionism, expectations and the reality of these.
- Availability, extent and nature of what they have viewed.
- Length of time they view pornography.
- Start viewing at the age of 11-12 years
- The key is their current developmental stage and the impact such imagery has on the way they think, feel and act.
- Consequential impact on brain development.
- Increase in referrals over the past 5 or 6 years: Portman Clinic – John Woods (November 2010) – referrals for problematic internet usage – 0% 1997 to 26% 2010 – adult pornography addiction being one of the major reasons for referral.
- Problems presented by the young men:
  - Intimacy deficits
  - Unrealistic sexual expectations of their partner
  - Inability to show empathy when in engaging in sexual activity – such lack of empathy often doesn’t match the young men’s personal presentation when not involved in sexual activity
  - Relationship breakdown

Children made the subject of abusive images

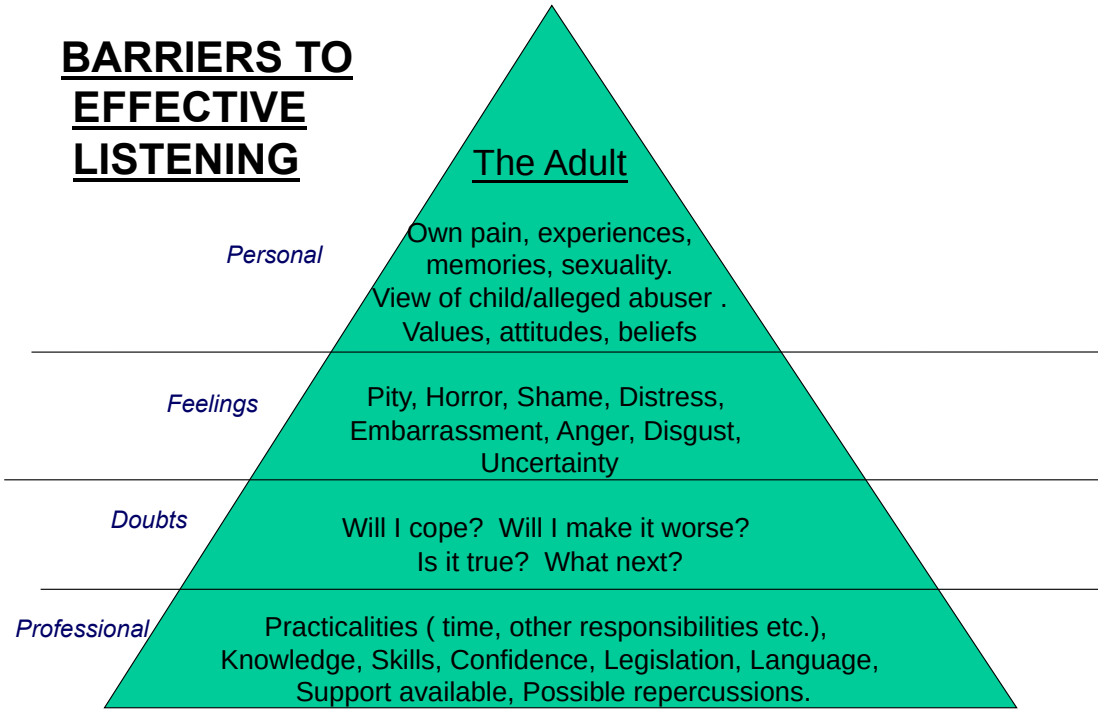
- The impact of being the subject of abusive images is a recipe for non-disclosure, which results in silencing and/or denial.
- Due to shame, guilt, seen “to be doing it”, “smile please”, and the nature of the relationship with the offender.
- New recovery issues: Impotence regarding disclosure, shame, responsibility, and non-resolution of the abuse experienced.
- There is very little research from a victim’s perspective.
- Data from NCMEC from 1998: 31st Dec. 2010 regarding relationship of identified victims to the abuser – 3,358 identified victims – 66% known to the child, 14% coerced through online enticement, 14% self-produced, 3% Human trafficker, 3% unknown to the child – un-established relationships.

Young people’s risky and/or harmful behaviours online

- Harmful behaviours: Downloading abusive images of children, placing images of people/or themselves online, sexual solicitation, sexting and bullying.
- Concerning behaviour or just experimenting?

- Issues:
- Placing themselves and others at risk
- Needs supersede rules for young people
- Problems with labelling their behaviour
- Lack of understanding of developmental issues – brain development, emotional development,
- Increase in reports to Helplines and referral services
- No evidence based intervention models

Figure: Barriers to effective listening on the part of child care professionals



How can recovery services help?
Recovery services currently are not meeting the safeguarding and recovery needs of children. We need to review:

- How we manage the disclosure/discovery stage of the intervention process –This has implications for police and social practice – never underestimate the impact of disclosure on the child victim and their family.
- How we carry out the ABE interview of the child.
- How we address the new issues facing victims of internet abuse – such as non-resolution and the silencing.
- What support and information we give to the parents/carers of the victims.

- How we empower professionals working with children to feel confident in dealing with the possibilities that children in their charge may be experiencing abuse online.
- How we assist and treat children with sexually harmful behaviours online – contextualising their behaviours within their developmental stage and treating them as children first.
- How we empower this population through primary, secondary and tertiary prevention programmes.

What research studies need to take place to build up an evidence base?

- Studies from a victim perspective regarding the victims of child abuse images – age, sex, ethnicity and the circumstances in which these images are made. To achieve this we need a more rigorous systematic collection of information throughout the world which will allow measurement of changes in these demographical details as time goes on (Quayle and Jones).
- Studies of the victims' experience, including the differential impacts on them when the internet is involved in their abuse, to better inform practitioners helping in their recovery.
- Studies of the impact on their mental health for those who have accessed adult pornography from an early age.
- Studies on the impact on carers/parents and wider family members when a child within the family has been groomed online to ascertain how best to support them.
- Studies of how young people engage in viewing abusive images of children – what lead them to do so in the first instance, what maintained their interest and what might assist in their desisting from such behaviours.
- Improvement in date collection through synchronisation of date to be collated, a review of what is noted in our Criminal justice statistics and etc.

3. Virtual Violence: Protecting Children from Cyberbullying

Thaddaeus Douglas
Director of Research and Development, Beatbullying

The findings from Beatbullying's 2009 study, 'Virtual Violence: Protecting Children from Cyberbullying' provide a picture of the extent of the problem in the UK and which groups of children are particularly vulnerable or belong to high risk groups.

Virtual Violence: Protecting Children from Cyberbullying, 2009 Report[5]

The Beatbullying 2009 report administered a survey to 2000 children and young people. Our hypothesis was 'to what extent are vulnerable groups more susceptive to persistent and intentional bullying'.

- Some acknowledgements about vulnerabilities. Firstly, anybody can be vulnerable in any given time point, they are not a static, self-contained group. Secondly, while some children are more likely to be bullied than others, we need to understand that aggression can be completely unpredictable. In other words, an existing strong indicator of vulnerability is not an absolute predictor of bullying.
- Some considerations we made when looking at vulnerability: children experiencing family difficulty and are brought up in chaotic family environment; children with disabilities; children who experience 'exclusion of access'.
- A third of 11-16 years old had been targeted, threatened or humiliated by an individual or group through the use of mobile phones or the internet. We are aware there are some disparities with other research findings such as EU Kids Online, possible for the disparities are: time and location of the study, definition employed, etc.
- A quarter of those who experienced cyberbullying said this was an on-going experience. That is, 1 in 13 children experienced continuous cyberbullying by the same person or group. There are approximately 4.5 million age 11-16 in the UK, these can be extrapolated to suggest that 340,000 experience persistent bullying by technology.
- Children identified as having special educational needs 16% more likely to be persistently cyber bullied over a prolonged period of time.
- Pupils receiving free school meals are 13% more likely to be persistently cyber bullied over a prolonged period of time.
- White non-British ethnic background, and females all reported a higher incident of this intense form of cyberbullying.

[5] Reports can be accessed downloaded from the Beatbullying website http://www.beatbullying.org/dox/resources/reports.html

Virtual Violence II: Progress and Challenges in the Fight against Cyberbullying, 2012 Report

- Fieldwork was carried out in 2011 where we partnered with NAHT. We also looked at how teachers and educational professionals who may well have been victimized through technology. We covered the views of over 4500 of children and young people in all regions of the UK.
- Similar findings emerging, although seeing a reduction in the prevalence of bullying.
- To what extent are vulnerable children more susceptible to online bullying? children with special education needs are 18% more likely to be persistently bullied over a prolonged period of time. Children who looked after a family member who has disability or illness (i.e. young carers) were 13% more likely to be cyber bullied. Children who received free school meals were 3% more likely to be cyber bullied.

CyberMentors

The main way Beatbullying provides support to young people is by training peer-to-peer cyber mentors. These mentors are young people predominantly age 11-25, who go online and support their peer in an online environment.

CyberMentors has been having quite significant impact in terms of reaching communities and schools and vulnerable children online: Recently being accredited as a validated practice under the Centre for Excellence of Outcomes in Children and Young People's Services (C4EO). Over 250 schools, over 5000 young people trained as CyberMentors. There have been more than 1.5 million users who have visited the websites.

Section 3: Children with special needs/disabilities

CHAIR: Terry Waller – Education Consultant

Key questions: Are the risks different for children with disabilities? Are some disabled children more vulnerable than others? Who takes advantage of their vulnerability? What evidence exists for our current knowledge base?

1. Children and young people with disabilities and their online safety

Sue Cranmer
Futurelab

A commentary on what research evidence currently exists in relation to children and young people with disabilities and their online safety and determining the gaps.

Defining disability
The social model of disability challenges the idea that disabilities are caused by bodily impairment. Instead it is the environment that disables people because it restricts their movements and their ability to communicate and function as effectively as people without impairments.

- Shift towards conceiving of disability as a 'social model': There have been significant strides in theorizing the conceptualization of disability that move beyond highly medicalised, deficit-based understanding of persons with disabilities toward a "social model" of disability that contends that disability is a social status resulting from cultural values and practices that stigmatise, marginalise, and oppress disabled people' (Foley 2003: 35).

Method

- Searches on Google and Google Scholar conducted in August 2011 with these search words: 'Children', 'young people', 'disability', 'disabled', 'online technologies', 'e-safety', 'online safety'
- Experts are contacted by members of the research panel. Input also sought via Twitter.
- Very little was found.

Access and use
The study by Lathouwers, de Moor, & Didden (2009)[6] compared 97 physically disabled adolescents with 1566 non-disabled adolescents.

- No differences in access; similar common activities.

[6] Lathouwers, K., de Moor, J., & Didden, R., (2009), 'Access to and Use of Internet by Adolescents who Have a Physical Disability: A Comparative Study'

- Physically disabled adolescents are more often warned by their parents about the risks of the internet, and more often had rules at home.
- Parents of physically disabled adolescents warn them more often and check their use of the internet more often than care staff do.

Negotiating identity online

The study by Soderstrom (2009)[7] examined the significance of ICT in Norwegian disabled youth's identity negotiations in the intersections of age, gender and disability. The sample composed of 23 disabled 15 – 20 year olds.

- ICT provides opportunities for inclusion but also marginalization
- Access to ICT and provision of ICT assistive devices do not necessarily provide usable and suitable ICT
- Some disabled youth feel neglected/excluded from their peers

Negotiating identity online – assistive technologies

Another study by Soderstrom (2009)[8] investigated the symbolic values and use of assistive technologies from the perspective of 11 visually impaired young Norwegians.

- Use of ICT usually symbolises competence, belonging and independence
- However, use of assistive technologies is found to symbolise restriction, difference and dependency
- To fit in as ordinary young people, visually impaired participants reject assistive technologies where possible/blind participants – without this choice – accept assistive technologies

Conclusions

- August 2011 snapshot, some new research emerging
- Very few broad studies have been carried out in the area, e.g. of access and use for instance, online safety
- Other studies focussing on more niche areas – for instance, risk in identity negotiation, using assistive technologies
- More work needed to answer the questions posed by our agenda.

[7] Soderstrom, S. (2009) The significance of ICT in disabled youth's identity negotiations. Scandinavian Journal of Disability Studies, 11, 131-144

[8] Soderstrom, S. (2009) The significance of ICT in disabled youth's identity negotiations. Scandinavian Journal of Disability Studies, 11, 131-144.

2. Munch Poke Ping: Vulnerable, excluded young people and their confidence in using Social Media

Stephen Carrick-Davies
Independent E-safety consultant

The Munch Poke Ping project[9] explores how excluded young people in Pupil Referral Units understand risk and handle harm online, how the technology amplify vulnerability, Identifying what support those working with vulnerable children need in using social media, and how we can find positive ways of empowering vulnerable young people to help and teach us.

Pupil Referral Units

PRUs (or Short Stay Schools) are DfE registered educational establishments managed by local authorities and subject to inspections by Ofsted. They teach students excluded from school on a permanent or fixed-term basis. There are approximately 421 PRUs, and on average each school has 50 students. In totally, there is approximately 18,000 PRUs students. They may:

- Have emerging personality disorders, severe anxiety and depression as well as other mental health and/or medical needs
- Be pregnant school-age mothers
- Be school refusers, phobics or be young carers
- Have statements of special educational need whose placements are not yet agreed, or pupils awaiting assessment
- Asylum seekers and refugees who have no school place
- Children who, because of entering public care or moving placement, require a change of school place and are unable to access a school place.

Aims of the Munch Poke Ping Project

1. What additional risks do vulnerable YP encounter, and bring to social media?
2. What can we learn from those who are working in this area to go 'upstream'?
3. What training and support do professionals need regarding social media risk in their practice?

We learn about the experiences from young people through their own film-making, and learn from practitioners through visits and surveys.

What can make these young people vulnerable online?

[9] http://www.carrick-davies.com/mpp

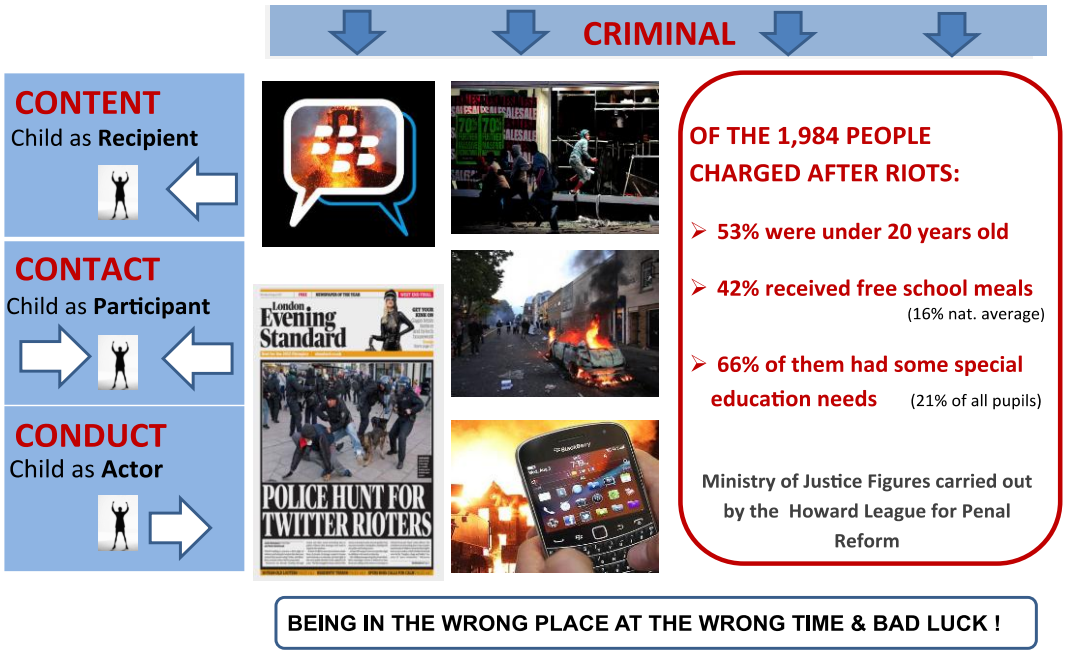
- Low self-confidence. Identity seen to be part of 'outsiders'
- Fluid learning environment and gaps in education and induction
- Experience abusive relationships or environments including anger
- Influences of alcohol, drugs and gang culture. Risk takers and at risk
- More unsupervised time, fewer structures and boundaries
- Lack of supportive adults in their lives

Who takes advantage of their vulnerability?

It is complex, in part because of the way young people view their position. We may see them as vulnerable, but many of them see themselves as in control. The following quotations reveal this contradictory position:

- "Many of the young people I work with are massive risk takers, impulsive to the extreme and often use alcohol and/or drugs. On average they first engage in sexual activity at a far younger age than other students. They also have huge amounts of unsupervised time on their hands, often till very late at night. I teach many YP who are half-asleep as they have been online till gone 3am." – *PRU staff member.*
- "I have over 120 people on my BBM but I deleted like 30 on Saturday cause I was angry and they pissed me off so I just deleted them. Since I've had my BlackBerry only 2 people have deleted me." – *PRU student*.

Figure: Are vulnerable young people more vulnerable in these classifications?



The social media space

- It is a space that is both ‘abstract’ out there, but also private, personal and intimate. In it, communications can be uploaded, munched (screen-captured), amplified, re-broadcasted, forwarded, commented on, copied, stored, morphed, changed, or simply dormant. May we call it an ‘incubator’?

Why social media can amplify existing vulnerability?

- Allows for unmediated contact
- Social location embedded
- Excludes some from the ‘norm’: e.g. FaceBook Timeline & vanity tools
- Facilitates complex “gifting” and grooming by peers
- Introduces new services (often taken up by very young people)
- Can subtly be used to ‘nudge’ young people into criminality: e.g. financial fraud
- Extend negative reputation online
- 24/7 nature can come at time of lowest resilience
- Doesn’t account for special needs & learning difficulties
- Safety tools still require a high degree of Language & Literacy

Eight main findings under four key themes of:

- Identity: Reputation, status, compulsion, peer-pressure, membership.
- Relationships: Fun, romance, flirting, sexuality, sharing, family, teachers.
- Conflict: Suspicion, hidden rules, assumed norms and values, emotions.
- Coping: Resilience, reporting, teachers, parents, peer group.

It is imperative to be informed by young people’s own experience of online risk and modelling positive use of social media. We need to view youth as active participants and stakeholders rather than potential victims, and empower them to protect themselves, support their peers and teach others.

Section 4: Panel discussion and future directions

CHAIR: Professor Sonia Livingstone, London School of Economics

Members:

1. Graham Ritchie, CEOP
2. Teresa Hughes, The Lucy Faithfull Foundation
3. Tink Palmer, The Marie Collins Foundation
4. Deborah McGovern, The Internet Watch Foundation
5. Terry Waller, Include ICT
6. Stephen Carrick-Davies, independent consultant

The UKCCIS Evidence Group has become increasingly interested in understanding what makes some children more vulnerable to online risk of harm than others. This question is crucial in order to:

(i) identify *which children* may be more vulnerable and target resources so as to meet their specific needs,

(ii) identify the *conditions* (offline and online) that increase vulnerability in order to manage these conditions where feasible

(iii) recognise that *most children* are relatively resilient and able to cope with online risk and so need not be 'wrapped in cotton wool'.

In planning this seminar, the Evidence Group was aware that the internet may not only afford vulnerable children increased risk of harm but it could also offer them valuable opportunities for privacy, advice and support. Thus the seminar has sought to recognise the complex balance of opportunities and risks that vulnerable children may encounter online, rather than simply seeking ways of restricting their internet access.

The seminar planning was also guided by the view that vulnerability (and protective) factors are likely to be highly diverse, so that 'vulnerable children' cannot be considered a homogenous group. As Tolstoy observed at the start of Anna Karenina, "Happy families are all alike; every unhappy family is unhappy in its own way." Since the same is likely to be true of vulnerable children, seminar speakers were invited to address the distinctive needs of children according to their circumstances, in order to inform a more tailored approach to internet safety.

Indeed, empirical research generally reveals the contingency of particular outcomes on the diversity of children's circumstances. This suggests that we should move beyond the binaries of vulnerable/resilient (and perpetrator/victim, friend/stranger, accidental/deliberate, etc.) to understand when and why some children become vulnerable to particular risks. There is

no easy way of delimiting what may be relevant – as the seminar has heard, children's vulnerability online is significantly shaped not only by their personal circumstances and their particular online encounters but also by wider norms of friendship, privacy, intimacy and trust.

To begin its work, the Evidence Group commissioned a literature review from Emily Munro in 2011.[10] This review revealed how little research regarding vulnerable children online is currently published. Thus it was heartening, in this seminar, to hear the latest findings from a number of ongoing projects, providing evidence from a range of different areas of research and practice. It was especially important to the Evidence Group that we brought together academic research with the experiences of practitioners, and it became apparent during the seminar that while the former struggle with limited funding and methodological challenges, the latter instead struggle to raise awareness of internet-related issues within established, even entrenched professional practices that need to be revised and updated for the digital age.

In sum, to inform evidence-based policy so as to advance the broader agenda of making children safer online, it is important to be clear about what we do now know and what we have still to find out. Summary points from the panel discussion concluding the seminar follow below.

What do we now know about vulnerable children online?

- It seems that the age where children become vulnerable tends to begin at around 11. There is also clear statistics that showed the percentage of disabled children being bullied is 13%. We can devise a matrix to show the areas where children with what characteristics can be vulnerable online according to the developmental age of the child, from 0 to 18. This should link to the relevant Key Stage curriculum areas within schools.

- Action is needed from the start of the secondary school, or the end of primary school. To complicate the idea of age, a piece of research from Jane Brown in the U.S. shows that the vulnerable teenagers are those that come to sexuality maturity or exploration earlier than their peers. We need to think about the appropriate timing to give advice and support.

- There should be an agreement on where the prevention messages need to happen, and what they need to look like. Given the complexity of vulnerability, the language used in the messages should also be carefully thought out so children know that we are not just naming individual websites, but referring to a particular internet activities. The messages should be repeated in a language accessible to children.

[10] See http://www.saferinternet.org.uk/Content/Childnet/Safer-Internet-Centre/downloads/Research_Highlights/Munro_OnlinevulnerabilityReporttoDFE-Final-October2011.pdf

- Schools need to train the trainers, whether about the fear around technology or about the prevention messages. Admittedly this is resource intensive, but it is also important.

- With the bar in terms of legality of pornography being lifted all the time, age verification is needed more than ever. Some very young children are now accessing adult contents online. In recent cases at the Old Bailey, the jury has ruled a number of sexual acts which were previously considered to be extreme pornography and criminal to be non-criminal. Potentially we are seeing a shifting of extreme pornography onto the mainstream. The nature of pornography has not changed, but the bar of what is legal and illegal has. Society is taking a different view on what is criminal or not in terms of pornography. Materials that are censored by BBFC may be available online in full without age classification.

- We are seeing an increase in calls from parents for children accessing or downloading pornography. The age group of people being arrested and come to the social service organizations is dropping, with an increase of young men between the age of 20 to 25 being reported. We need to research motivations behind why young people download pornography, especially extreme pornography.

- We need to ask social services organisations for the evidence of trends they receive over the last couple of years. UKCCIS has a sense of growing problem of more claims, more incidents, and more extreme risks affecting young people. Yet the evidence is not always available.

- The evidence group has identified two categories of vulnerability: those who are vulnerable offline and online, and those newly identified as vulnerable online but give no indication of their vulnerability offline. We also need to investigate who are the children that are not traditionally considered to be vulnerable but not yet identified as vulnerable online.

- There are barriers to sending prevention messages out. Professional bodies such as teachers and social workers have a duty to safeguard children and youth, but they are under- trained or resourced to do that. In fact, questions about children's internet activities are not being asked, sometimes because professionals themselves do not know how to provide support when there is a problem. There should be more awareness-raising across the school about how teachers can ask about children's online activities. Professionals should give children the message that they understand there is the online world and it may be a cause of concern, the door is always open if the children wish to talk. Professional bodies should be encouraged to improve their duty of care by devising comprehensive risk assessments that include children's internet activities.

- The more adults around children make themselves emotionally available to children, the more children feel they can confide in the adults that they have been harmed. Also, there might be a delay of expression of traumatic experiences. Professionals should make enquiry and have receptiveness in order to understand children's trouble. It is important for children to know they have a network of support as well as a means to have a voice.

- When professionals see a child showing signs of risks, and that child comes to the attention of any of the services, then one should ask questions about the internet. The questions about the internet, and what to do when children need support should be part of the teachers' training module. UKCCIS has a role in offering that kind of professional advice.

- No matter we are talking about the medical model of vulnerability or social model, they do not contradict each other. There should be research in the area of teenage impulsivity, how it impacts on adolescent's vulnerabilities on the internet, and how we can create a care-free environment for someone who is impulsive.

- All children go through the adolescence period of brain development of risk-taking, impulsivity, etc. Yet relatively few of these come to the attention of the social services. What progress have we made on understanding the range of factors that lead some children as deserving attention from the services?

- Technology itself affords some degree of risk-taking activity by teenagers. We should talk less of vulnerable children and more about children who are vulnerable in particular contexts. Relevant factors include not only the technological environment, but also the economic, social, cultural environment, social attitudes toward sexuality, degrees of poverty, etc.

- We should involve key representatives from areas such as health and industry and those who work with families. They should consider the worst case scenario as part of their work, and consult the experts as part of their work.

- The best practice at the local level is a holistic multi-agency set up – social workers, health services, representatives of children and so forth - to foster a common understanding of the problem. There are already some multi-agency at local level, so we are not starting from scratch, just have to enhance those agencies.

- Children and parents both may need the prevention message repeated and reinforced, and also conveyed in a variety of ways that are accessible to them.

Messages to the industry

- The industry needs to share the responsibility of internet safety. The services provided by the industry should mirror the same essence of what we view as good parenting offline. The internet is designed and can be re-designed carefully for its users. Industry should bring experts on board at some point during the design process to ensure internet safety concerns are taken into account, and seek to prevent the rise of any unintended consequences.

- We should encourage the implementation of ethics and responsibilities into media and software design degree courses, so that those working in industry know why safeguards should be built into the design stage, rather than requiring later reactive interventions.

- We need to forge a partnership that involves parents, school, social services and the industry. Vulnerabilities cannot be approached single-handedly, all have to take part.

- We need to raise awareness of professionals about child internet safety across the board. This needs to include the message that everyone needs to play a part in keeping children safe online.

What do we not know? What do we want to know next?

- There are many subsets of vulnerable groups, and they need to be identified.
- Anyone who works with you needs new advice about how to spot problems with children and link to online activity. There is a need to widen the profile of those supporting youth. Section 47 assessment needs to ask questions on online use.
- We need to understand better how the internet is fitting into all kinds of changing practices. Social organizations need to respond to the rapid changing digital world. We can encourage the links between CEOP and health professionals. Yet the procedures within some social organizations are deep-rooted and rigid, it will be a challenge to change those procedures.
- There is little research written for practitioners to help with youth, such as how to deal with sexting pictures already being disseminated. Practitioners ought to be supported with best practice guidance and research evidence.
- With regard to youth downloading child-abuse pictures, adult pornography or sexually-harmful materials, we need to know what their motivation is, when it becomes something significant, and if it is the same as adults downloading and collecting child-abuse images, or if it is a completely different phenomenon. Ultimately, research needs to work toward reduction or some risk reduction framework for understand of vulnerability and mitigating strategies.

- Parents have a key role in helping children and youth. There are a lot of resources that are willing to help and to engage parents in intervention. We need to engage them. However, parents nowadays may find it hard to say no to the children, which might be a new trend and would complicate the parental intervention.
- Parents themselves may be scare of the technology and want hands-on practices. We should encourage senior representatives from a range of bodies that work with families and put out a call for 'a next chapter in e-safety'.
- There is not enough research about youth with disability. There is a lack of understanding in their social media use, support, personal, social identity online and offline.
- It has been a perennial problem of how we treat young people's sexually harmful behaviours. Some organizations struggle with how to deal with the questions of children's sexually harmful behaviours. They lack support and understanding of what the risk is.
- Prevention messages and safety practices cannot create boundary around the fast changing technology. The most challenging question is how we can promote resilience, what we know about the kind of programme which will support young people, what we know about resilience and how to strengthen the knowledge.
- Recovery from the cyber bullying experience is important, but few services are available for young victims. There is no agreed model for services, resources have been scarce, and the training is resource-intensive. It would be helpful to have a national approach to recovery.
- If we can have a cluster of syndromes and behaviors (of being cyber bullied), it then is more likely to mobilize resources. Yet, there is also the fear of putting labels on the victims.

Closing remarks

Tink Palmer

Tink Palmer thanked everyone for giving their valuable time to participate in today's seminar. She noted that the contributions from the presenters and the discussions that have taken place throughout the day have been invaluable. The very nature of the interaction from all who attended highlights how important understanding the issue of vulnerability is to those involved in keeping children safe online.

Tink gave assurances that the seminar would be the spring board for taking matters forward and that the outcomes from the seminar would be relayed to the UKCCIS Executive Board with a view to planning how to implement the next phase of better understanding vulnerability online.

About UKCCIS

The UK Council for Child Internet Safety (UKCCIS) was formed in 2008 and it brings together over 170 organisations and individuals from government, industry, law enforcement, academia and charities – including groups representing parents and children. Our aim is to work in partnership to keep children and young people safe online.

The work of UKCCIS is overseen by an Executive Board, which is chaired jointly by Tim Loughton MP, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Children and Families and Lynne Featherstone MP, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Equalities and Criminal Information. The Board sets the strategic direction and priority areas of work for UKCCIS, informed by the UKCCIS Evidence Group and the recommendations made in the Byron and Bailey reviews.

The Board meets on a six-weekly basis to oversee the work of the Council and commission work to subgroups of Council members. The Board considered the recommendations set out in the Byron and Bailey reviews and established key priority areas for the work of UKCCIS to cover. These are:

- Industry self-regulation
- Parental controls
- Awareness and understanding of parents and children
- Evidence

The Government has established a project team fully supported by officials from DfE, the Home Office, Ministry of Justice and the Department for Culture, Media and Sport to support the work of UKCCIS and the Executive Board. Some of the key achievements include:

- The four main fixed-line Internet Service Providers (ISPs), BT, Sky, TalkTalk and Virgin, were the first to commit to active choice for broadband connections. They published a code of practice in October 2011, which will see all new customers making an active choice about parental controls by October 2012;
- Ministers have chaired roundtables to help progress active choice with desktop, laptop and tablet sectors, and with the mobile phone industry. Vodafone has recently released its own applications for Android smartphones, which lets parents apply advanced controls across the range of things that smart phones do, and Dixons has led the way with in-store promotion of safety messages, on screen demonstrations and till receipts wallets;
- The Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre (CEOP) has led on the creation of UKCCIS advice on child internet safety which is a perfect example of the benefits of the partnership approach to protecting children online; and
- There has been widespread support for Safer Internet Day every year. The theme of Safer Internet Day 2012 was ‘Connecting generations’.