



Report on Wilton Park Conference WPS04/6

COMBATING CHILD ABUSE ON THE INTERNET: AN INTERNATIONAL RESPONSE

Monday 22 – Wednesday 24 March 2004

Conference held in co-operation with
National Crime Squad, UK
Foreign and Commonwealth Office, UK

Summary

1. Children have a right to be protected. Child victims of abuse need to know that there will be justice against offenders and that abusive pictures will be removed from the Internet. Those viewing images need to recognise that the Internet is no hiding place; those involved in organised criminal activity selling abusive images need to know that that it is not a safe place to do business. Creative ways are needed to make the Internet a harder place to access abusive images, thus reducing demand and therefore actual abuse.

2. The commitment of many individuals and countries is making a significant difference to tackle child abuse on the Internet. But much more still needs to be done if children are to be adequately protected from those who seek to abuse them sexually, produce images to distribute over the Internet, “groom”¹ children on-line or send them unsolicited obscene material. The number of abusive images on the Internet continues to grow alarmingly and organized crime groups are increasingly using the sale of child abuse images as a way of making money. The problem is now truly global. This illegal activity should be regarded as serious crime, causing corrosive harm to society. It needs to be addressed urgently at national and international level. Government, law enforcement, industry (including Internet Service Providers (ISPs), software designers,

¹ Groom: online enticement of children for sexual acts

credit companies) and non-government organizations all play a crucial role in combating child abuse on the Internet, and must work in partnership.

3. Different solutions are needed in different countries; but much can be learnt from others' best practice. Greater awareness is needed of the nature and scale of Internet child abuse, through the use of media, advertising, sensitising politicians and judiciary etc. National legislation needs tightening up in many countries, and work towards greater harmonisation of international law would be beneficial. Law enforcement needs to be proactive and to share information across borders. Ways need to be found to assist countries for whom this is a new subject and which have fewer resources.

4. Significant questions remain. Whose responsibility is it to remove abusive images from the Internet? How can an environment of distrust be created on the Internet to ensure that those seeking to use it for child abuse purposes realise that it is not safe to do so? How can law enforcers get ahead of the organised crime groups who see this as a new way of making money? What can be done in countries less willing to take action or where legislation is weaker which criminals will seek to exploit? How can law enforcers and others work with industry whilst new technology is being developed?

"It's all about the kids"

5. The overriding aim is to remove children from abusive situations and to protect those at risk from abusive situations from harm. Child protection should be a national priority. Teachers and social workers need to identify children at risk. In many cases sexual abusers are known to the child, however children are very reluctant to report abuse. Painstaking police work, often across continents, is needed to identify the children in abusive photographs which appear on the Internet. Greater co-operation is needed between police, health and social agencies in an attempt to identify the children. As victims children need to be treated very carefully given that they are also witnesses to crime so as to ensure they are not further harmed or distressed by the process of gathering evidence.

6. The long-term psychological impact of sexual abuse on each child is very significant; more so than in the past as images can be "on-line" forever. Abused

children are likely to need more support from social services than previously, given that the child has to live with the knowledge that anyone could access the images at any stage. The cycle of abuse also needs to be broken – more than half of the active prostitutes on the streets have a history of abuse as a child. In Canada 61% of teenage mothers had been abused as a child. Two thirds of those who run away from home are believed to have been physically or sexually abused. In many countries, abused children are becoming infected with sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) and HIV. (In Cambodia for example, of those abused, 40% have STDs, 20% are HIV positive.) It is recognised also that some children become abusers themselves and are involved in making and distributing images of abuse. Further research is needed to understand this correlation.

Understanding the Scale of the Problem

7. Demand for images of child abuse over the Internet is created by viewers; increased demand for images leads to increased physical abuse.

8. The number of Internet users continues to increase dramatically across the globe; quadrupling in the UK since 1999 for example. The volume of images seized has increased exponentially and is very much larger than pre-Internet days. For example:

- in 1995 Greater Manchester Police seized 12 illegal images of children;
- in 1998 750,000 images were seized from 105 individuals worldwide;
- Operation LANDSLIDE in 1999 involved 35,000 US citizens and 6,500 UK citizens purchasing child abuse material on the Internet;
- one Canadian citizen had 1 million images on his computer;
- in 2001 105,000 abusive images were posted in 30 newsgroups in 16 days;
- in 2002 20 new children appeared in abusive images in a small subset of newsgroups within a period of six weeks. 35,000 new images were generated from the abuse of these children (COPINE project).

9. The Internet has made it much easier for offenders to see abusive images. The key question is the link between the possession of images and actual abuse. Based upon arrests made by the US Postal Service, 34% of all individuals arrested for possession or trafficking child abuse images were, in fact, child molesters themselves.

Canadian research believes 40% of those viewing images have abused or are abusers². In Toronto, of 700 people who were known to be viewing images, about 300 were abusing children – and each is likely to abuse more than one child. **There is therefore at least a 1 in 3 chance that someone in possession of images is, or has been, involved in physical abuse of a child.** The Lucy Faithful Foundation, in its work with offenders, recognises that some offenders abuse children without first viewing or collecting images of abuse.

10. **Trends since 2003**

- increased use of **mobile phones**³ to access the Internet and the development of **3 G phones** (including the use of “private space” in individuals’ phones); Japan’s experience provides a sobering warning of the challenges ahead with over 85% of all mobiles in Japan now “internet-enabled”. These mobile phones have digital camera functions or digital video functions. There is growing concern that child abuse pictures can be taken and sent with 3 G mobile phones across borders. 3 G phones have a roaming feature so it could be possible for a Japanese suspect to take child abuse photos in Cambodia and send to a site in Europe. The phone company, rather than the ISP, becomes the e-mail server for such messages;
- increasing **commercialisation** of viewing child abuse images for financial gain with pay-per-view sites. Of 66 new sites identified each week by the Internet Watch Foundation in the UK, half are now pay-per-view, (the remainder are collection swapping);
- the link with **organised crime** for the systematic recruitment and abuse of children is growing; some organised crime groups see child abuse images as just another part of their business (also involved in identification fraud, extortion, etc.); organised crime groups are looking to operate in countries where legislation is weaker; one group co-ordinating 250 websites had a turnover of \$1.3 million in 6 weeks;
- increasing use of studios in which to take photographs, for example Eastern Europe where there is now open advertising for children to visit such studios;

² In a smaller study in the US Prison Service 70% of those in prison for possession of images owned up to abusing children.

³ According to public research in Japan, 40% of junior high school students and 89% of high school students have mobile phones.

- use of **virtual payment**, for example the growing use of e-gold as a “virtual” payment of purchasing gold to give credit for use on websites, shielding the original credit card payments.
- **on-line dating**, which is becoming increasingly common, for example in Japan, where girls are being put at greater risk. On-line dating services have expanded using internet-enabled mobile phones which are seen as a more secure environment than the internet⁴. On-line dating using the internet or internet-enabled mobile phones can lead to physical abuse as “bad men will travel”⁵.

Working in partnership to improve the response

11. Co-operation between law enforcement, judiciary, non-government organisations (NGO's) and the private sector (including the Internet industry, credit-card companies, advertisers, tour operators etc.) is crucial. Protocols between these may be appropriate. The UK's Home Secretary's Internet Task Force, bringing all the major players together, has made a significant difference to the speed at which issues can be addressed. It could be a useful model for others to adopt.

12. At the international level co-operation between law-enforcers needs to improve. Similarly between law-enforcement and NGOs and industry. Interpol and Europol can play a key role. Intergovernmental organisations such as UNICEF and the International Labour Organisation's International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour (ILO-IPEC) also play a role.

Increasing awareness of the risks

13. Increased awareness of the risks of child abuse can help to ensure that action is taken at national and international level. Many people in positions of authority need sensitising to heighten their awareness of the problem:

- politicians (this should include backbenchers and opposition politicians not just today's government Ministers);

⁴ Japanese law enforcement had 17 times more cases of on-line dating services involving children in 2003 than 2000. This rapid increase of crime involving on-line dating has resulted in new legislation relating to regulations of users and service providers.

⁵ Toby Studebaker, a former US marine, was sentenced in the UK to 4 years in prison on 2 April 2004 after using the Internet to "groom" a 12 year old British girl for sex and abducting her from the UK.

- Ministers of Interior and Tourism in countries seen as destinations for sex tourism (as has taken place in Cambodia);
- judges, (through seminars etc rather than “training”) including demonstrating the link between possession and abuse; sentencing has improved where this has been done;
- diplomats – some Embassies are less inclined to assist when countries have specific cases relating to a foreign national. It is recommended that this should be included in diplomatic training.

14. The following actions to heighten awareness are recommended, many having been successfully adopted in different countries:

- developing hotlines – often run by small NGOs;
- creative use of the media is crucial; sensitising journalists, and the use of TV (including documentary), radio, billboard posters etc. all have a part to play and have been used successfully in many countries;
- using the economic costs to get the awareness message across, for example increased social welfare work, social disorder resulting from child abuse etc;
- designing messages which “shock” can heighten awareness
- recruiting university students (rather than law enforcement officers) to visit schools (a nationwide project in Poland enrolled students as volunteers to highlight risks to children of Internet use. An NGO co-ordinated this project and provided material);
- providing appropriate materials for teachers on the Internet;
- providing messages for children themselves on the safe use of the Internet;
- looking for opportunities where children themselves can speak;
- in sex-tourist destinations, sensitising locals that it is a domestic problem as well as one brought in by foreigners; tourists are more visible and sometimes easier to catch but this is only the “tip of the iceberg”. In the Dominican Republic, it is estimated that 30% of child abusers are from overseas and 70% are local. In Sri Lanka there have been 10 successful prosecutions of foreigners, over 100 of locals;
- creative awareness should be considered, for instance the use of cereal packets, targeting fast-food chains, and hotel chains in sex-tourist destinations; use of adverts in airports (eg supported by NGOs); in-flight videos (eg Virgin) on flights to sex-tourist destinations.

- reaching out to ethnic minority groups.

More academic research is needed in order to demonstrate the risks. As governments sell licences for 3G technology, it is recommended that some of this new income is invested in education and safety campaigns. Law enforcement and the NGOs etc. should press for this as licences are being negotiated.

Improving the response by industry

15. Many argue that the industry has a moral responsibility to prevent abusive images being available on the Internet and call for it to do more to remove them and prevent them being available through their services. Many ISP providers have done a lot to educate children using their services, for example on-line guidelines, developing “netiquette”, hosts in chat rooms (albeit unregulated), easy on-line reporting for children, parental controls (however children are more computer literate than their parents), SPAM filtering.

16. However, self-regulation of the Internet may no longer be enough and in the longer term ISPs may see lawsuits brought against them, parallel to cases against the tobacco industry. Many call for a moral and ethical edge to be introduced by the industry. The Internet industry can do more to create an environment of distrust it is suggested, for example following the lead of the music industry which has sought to find ways to make it difficult for people to pirate original copies. Ways need to be found to “jam” certain sites or content, particularly where the content originates from another country and cannot be taken off.

17. **Brand and image** are powerful issues for ISPs, search engines, credit cards etc, and can be a real motivator for change. Lobbying of ISPs and search engines etc by consumers, law enforcers and NGOs should continue to raise the issue and create pressure for action. Such action can prove successful, for example through the notification of illegal content which, in most countries, ISPs are legally bound to take down. In the UK successful work by the Internet Watch Foundation (IWF) has resulted in only about 1% of websites now reported originating from UK-based ISPs (down from 18% a few years ago). 55% of all illicit material notified to IWF was traced to US-based ISPs (there are 8000 ISPs in the USA, many of whom sell on their space to other

countries). Russian websites accounted for 23% (and as yet there is no hotline in Russia). Some ISPs are also setting up on abandoned oil rigs outside state control.

18. Additional recommendations include:

- ISPs should follow the example the “**know your customer**” model that banks are now needing to follow to prevent money laundering;
- law enforcement is encouraged to work much more closely with industry; Canadian law enforcement is now working proactively with Microsoft for example; and industry could put more resources towards the so-called “moral” side of the Internet;
- law enforcement should also work closely with industry to identify future challenges brought on by new technology and find creative ways to reduce the risks (eg on-line dating services through mobile phones); partnering the people who engineer the equipment and the individuals who market it;
- ISPs should force local subsidiary providers to apply their own standards;
- ISPs should work more closely together to create best practice guidelines (almost 90% of all e-mails go through Yahoo, AOL or Hotmail).
- ISPs should be encouraged to take voluntary action to ban certain newsgroups, even if the content is legal,;
- search engines should be targeted to do their part in removing access to illegal content; (the UK’s Internet Watch Foundation found that 80% of websites can be found through search engines);
- law enforcement needs quicker access to ISPs subscriber information, traffic and content; currently it takes time for the judicial process to work;
- the creation of national organisations such as the UK’s Internet Watch Foundation with hotlines etc is recommended where such an organisation does not yet exist. INHOPE, linking hotlines across Europe, is extremely valuable;
- where providers offer an on-line dating service they should ensure that children cannot access the service; government regulation and the imposition of fines might be appropriate.

19. The crux is how to deal with ISPs under private ownership and those based in countries which are less willing or able to deal with them. Another new issue to address is how to deal with virtual payments such as e-gold (see para 10). It is now harder to

use MasterCard and Visa in the UK to purchase illicit material after effective lobbying; similar pressure is needed on the use of e-gold.

Getting the legislation right

20. Ensuring that appropriate national legislation is in place is crucial. Legislation in many countries needs to be improved. This needs political will. A number of countries have made significant strides over the last year, for example Croatia and the Dominican Republic. Many, however, still rely on general anti-pornography and child abuse legislation despite having signed the UN Conventions⁶. A legal definition of child pornography still needs to be adopted in many countries. There is also need for greater harmonisation of national law with international law, for instance over the legal age of a child, legal age of sex.

21. Discrepancies in legislation in some countries needs sorting out, for example in Thailand's penal code a rape offence relates to girls, not boys, with indecent assault against boys resulting in less severe sentencing. Other discrepancies need addressing, for example the legality of viewing images in one country of someone in another country having sex with a child aged 14 where that is the legal age of consent.

22. Legislation also needs to be clearer on soliciting and around "morphing" of images (where software can be used to edit legal pictures and questions exist as to whether abuse has actually taken place). In addition it is suggested that consideration should be given to broadening national legislation to include:

- the written word advocating sex with children;
- artistic sites rather than photographs;
- "domain names" which promote child pornography;
- inducement for sex, or "paid dating" with a child through on-line dating services.

⁶ Article 19 of the **Convention on the Rights of the Child** sets the obligation for all "States Parties [to] take all appropriate legislative, administrative, social and educational measures to protect the child from all forms of physical or mental violence, injury or abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, maltreatment or exploitation, including sexual abuse.

Article 34 obliges "States Parties [to] undertake to protect the child from all forms of sexual exploitation and sexual abuse. For these purposes, States Parties shall in particular take all appropriate national, bilateral and multilateral measures to prevent:

(a) The inducement or coercion of a child to engage in any unlawful sexual activity;
(b) The exploitative use of children in prostitution or other unlawful sexual practices;
(c) The exploitative use of children in pornographic performances and materials.

23. The law also needs to be clear about the legality of ISPs (and others working to combat child abuse) saving images as part of their own investigations. For example in the UK a Memorandum of Understanding has been set up with the Crown Prosecution Service identifying circumstances where the police would not prosecute. This could be valuable elsewhere.

24. The use of national legislation to tighten up travel of sex offenders can be an important step forward – for example the UK Offences Act. Levels of sentencing can also play a powerful deterrent.

The Law enforcement response

25. Law enforcers face a major challenge in dealing with the volume of child abuse crime connected with the Internet; for example the UK was originally given 7,200 names from Operation Landslide; prioritisation is therefore crucial. In this case the names were prioritised into: previous offenders; those with current access to children; and those connected with law enforcement or the criminal justice system. Senior police management need to recognise the seriousness of the crime and help secure adequate resources (sensitising senior managers may be necessary).

26. The following best practice is recommended:

- the creation of **specialist units** and lead forces with particular specialisms. Such units need adequate training and resources. They also need to work with child protection units, social services etc.
- the **welfare** of law enforcement officers engaged in countering child abuse is crucial. Good training is needed for those officers to be engaged in this work. Mandatory counselling is recommended to deal with secondary and vicarious traumatic stress. It should be recognised that female officers can be at greater risk than men in suffering stress from this work;
- the use of crime reduction strategies and preventative work in this area;
- greater use of proactive policing and disruptive techniques is recommended, for instance gathering intelligence from offenders and using this operationally;
- where pay-per-view sites are involved following the money trail can be valuable. Similar banks to those involved in other money-laundering cases may be identified.

Credit card companies have the ability to sanction such banks and this could be used to greater effect;

- managing sex offenders effectively after their release from prison;
- better feedback from operations and prosecutions to learn from past errors and identify best practice.

27. Internationally there is a need for law enforcers:

- to share information and intelligence across police boundaries and internationally (there is still a tendency to protect “information territory” and an unwillingness to share information);
- to share best practice between themselves;
- to develop databases which “talk to one another” and avoidance of re-inventing wheels;
- for greater use of key contacts and 24/7 contacts. International police co-operation needs to be speeded up with the expansion of a network of 24/7 contact points, for example into Eastern European countries. A standard form of e-mail messages between law enforcement might be beneficial. It is recognised that formal police channels can take too long to transfer information. Informal channels can help reinforce official channels.

Improving international co-operation

28. Effective international co-operation depends upon effective organisation and co-operation at the local, regional and national levels.

29. At international level there is a need to focus on how to help countries which have fewer resources, and those countries which are destinations for sex tourists (often developing countries where expatriates take advantage of poor law enforcement and where families might collude to sell children to prostitution). Assisting the development of their legislation should be encouraged together with supporting law enforcement through training and resources such as software. Creative ways to use development assistance to encourage countries to follow up their international commitments should also be considered. Sharing best practice across borders is also crucial.

30. The G8 Strategy on Protecting children from sexual exploitation on the internet is a valuable tool and national strategies should follow suit. The Lyon Group of G8 countries will increasingly work to find solutions to help support Interpol and other countries (for example development of Childbase) and other tools.

31. An international **Virtual Global Taskforce** is also being created. One of its objectives is to place a law enforcement presence on the Internet; once in such a site viewers become locked into a series of pages provided by law enforcement, which also provide an opportunity to seek social/welfare. This should help to frighten away the curious and demonstrate that the Internet is not a safe meeting place for viewers. Consideration is also being given to the setting up of a Virtual Global Taskforce website.

32. It is suggested that additional consideration should be given to: clamping of sites with abusive images; greater use of warnings and adverts on the Internet to alert viewers that if they are looking for child abuse images they may find come into contact with law enforcement. Children would take comfort from this and more might come forward to report abuse. It is, after all, "all about the kids".

Robin Hart
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