



ISEC Illegal Use of the Internet Project — Cyber-typologies and Victimization

Aims

As globalisation brings people closer together, the use of technology across the lifespan assists with socialising and communicating with a range of friends and family. Using free technology such as SKYPE, WhatsApp and Facetime amongst others provides unprecedented 'contact' with a wide range of people. As we all increasingly engage in cyberspace, we must consider the related implications for our social and psychological development. Specifically, it is important to investigate the effect technology may have on the cognitions, emotions, identities and sexuality of youth in their formative years. Focusing on the latter, the internet brings with it the risk of negative sexual experiences and victimisation online, which in turn may lead to consequences in the real world. This research aimed to explore how multiple factors in the lives of young people may manifest in risks or resilience whilst navigating the online space. It is part of the recent work by the Centre for Abuse and Trauma Studies (CATS) leading a multi-national group of researchers on a European Commission funded investigation partially looking at adolescent behaviour online, with a focus on sexual solicitation and help-seeking behaviour. The work sought to provide clearer understanding of the risks young people face and how they may react when faced with adversity. Ultimately the research aimed to present new cyber-typologies of victimisation to better understand youth behaviour when faced with risky sexual encounters.

Key Findings

The analysis provided key descriptive data highlighting some of the risks adolescents in the UK, Italy and Ireland faced during their formative years whilst online:

- Most young people (**over 90%**) were **never** faced with requests for sexual behaviour online during their formative years.
- **UK youth**, when compared to their peers in Italy and Ireland, were the most likely to be approached online for sexual acts, with just **over half** claiming to have received requests.
- **Girls** were more likely to be solicited online than boys.
- **Italian** young people were the most likely to seek help and support after experiencing a negative approach.

Inferential analysis enabled the identification of new typologies of cyber-victimisation which considers the influence of multiple factors from both the real and virtual lives of young people. These in turn predict likelihood of sexual solicitation and whether or not a young person will seek support or help if they are feeling at risk:

- The **Adapted adolescent** group was the largest group and had the least number of risk behaviours online or offline, were the least vulnerable and least likely to receive sexual solicitations from an adult online.
- The **Inquisitive non-sexual** group had lower risk taking offline but higher online risk-taking. They were at low likelihood of receiving sexual solicitations or sending sexts.
- The **Inquisitive sexual** group demonstrated the highest rate of receiving requests for sexual information. They had a high likelihood of receiving sexual solicitations from adults. It is concerning that this group also had the highest likelihood of meeting up in person to engage in sexual activity.
- The **Risk-taking aggressive** category was the smallest group. They exhibited the highest risk taking on and offline, and were most likely to both harass and be harassed. They demonstrated real world



anti-social behaviour such as problems with authority (parents and teachers), truancy, school exclusion, drug and alcohol use. They had the highest levels of online/offline aggression towards others, including peers. However, they also had a heightened level of experiencing online/offline victimisation at the hands of others.

Policy Context

Rising victimisation as a consequence of cybercrime across the globe suggests that the reality of policing the virtual world and dealing with victims and offenders in this sphere is now a norm for police officers across national boundaries. More importantly, policing cybercrime is increasingly becoming a role of police outside of the high-tech and specialist crime units. This is important when drafting service and provisions that protect the public from opportunistic criminals across offence types, but also in the prevention of sexual harm to our most vulnerable.

Methodology

The sample consisted of 1166 young adults between the ages of 18 and 24 from three countries (United Kingdom, Ireland and Italy) who completed the questionnaire which was made available via Survey Monkey. The participants were asked to answer the questions in relation to their formative years, specifically during the age range of 12 to 16. The sample included 340 participants from the United Kingdom, 529 from Ireland and 297 respondents from Italy. The majority of the sample (70%) reported that they were in education at the time of responding, with 71.1% of respondents being female.

Background

It is essential to understand youth behaviour in both the real and virtual world. Young people are distinguishing less between their activities and actions on and offline, and are functioning within an augmented reality where they live and interact interchangeably within these realms. Understanding their behaviour online and its potential real world consequences is critical when dealing with the sexual risks young people face. Ensuring that appropriate awareness raising and identification of risk factors is key for youth, police, parents and educators alike to assist with the protection, prevention and intervention of these types of crimes against children.

Source ISEC Illegal Use of the Internet: Final Report 2016 (October 2016).

Available at: http://cats-rp.org.uk/pdf%20files/EU_Child_Online_Safety_Project.pdf

Research Team Professor Julia Davidson (Principal Investigator) and Dr. Jeffrey DeMarco (Project Manager)

Contact information Dr. Jeffrey DeMarco, Centre for Abuse and Trauma Studies (j.demarco@mdx.ac.uk)

RH#100 has been produced by Dr. Jeffrey DeMarco for the UKCCIS Evidence Group