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UK COUNCIL FOR CHILD INTERNET SAFETY

CATS

ISEC Illegal Use of the Internet Project — National Police Surveys

Aims

Understanding policing practice and preparedness in dealing with cybercrime, specifically online child sexual abuse (CSA), is of critical importance. The Centre for Abuse and Trauma Studies (CATS) has recently led a multi-national group of researchers on a European Commission funded investigation focusing on understanding the process and procedures across international boundaries and roles within police forces in dealing with these crimes. The work sought to encourage better partnerships between law enforcement and industry in developing and advocating good practice models in the area of online CSA. Through a better understanding of policing processes, this will ultimately assist the wider community of stakeholders in developing effective prevention techniques, assist with timely detection and deterrence, and add to the growing research foundation. The policing stream of the project had three primary yet interlinked objectives: (1) to clarify police understanding and process in engaging in the investigation of online CSA across roles and countries; (2) highlight areas of improved training and practice within policing online CSA; and (3) develop a set of recommendations and guidelines for police and associated bodies in dealing with these crimes.

Key Findings

The analysis provided key evidence illustrating the widespread nature of policing online CSA. It also indicated the importance of supporting widespread engagement with online crimes perpetrated against children of a sexual nature, as well as informing recommendations supported by empirical data related to training and future practice:

- Over **1/5** of the sample encountered some form of **cybercrime** on a weekly basis.
- Over **40 %** reported being actively involved in **investigations of indecent image collections, production** and **distribution**.
- The **majority (61%)** across all countries reported never having received **general** or **specialised** training in dealing with online CSA cases. Of those who had, nearly **2/5** stated that the training they did receive was **inadequate**.
- Those who had **received** training and had been in their roles for **longer** periods of time were more likely to **recommend** new and evolving partnerships with external organisations in combatting online CSA.
- **Policy and practice must become more responsive and able to rapidly adapt to an evolving cyberspace** as police forces need to always be up-to-date with best practice in the investigation and prevention of emerging cybercrime.
- **Emphasis on systematic policing and industry collaboration.** There is a willingness on the part of law enforcement to engage with commercial and industry partners in a more systematic manner. It was clear that there is a great deal to be gained from a more joined up working approach, ensuring that policing knowledge is up to date and ultimately in securing a safer Internet for children. There should be a range of provisions implemented including the industry mentoring of specialist police officers; named industry points of contact for police forces; joint cross-discipline task forces; and the contribution of industry to basic law enforcement training on cyberspace and their own safety parameters.

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- **The development of specialist training at a basic level for all rank and file officers,** this concerns the officers' preparedness to practically to deal with cases of online CSA. Knowledge about the nature of online CSA crimes, child and offender behaviour online; an understanding of the relevant legislation: the practice of collecting evidence; the effective and supportive interviewing of child victims of online abuse; the interviewing of child offenders. The second issue concerns the best practice for monitoring the web in preventing such cases, as well as having fast, timely contacts with the potential victims (e.g., through online reporting), to rapidly tracking the origin of a potential cybercrime, and in using industry knowledge to develop more sensitive approaches to the identification of potential offenders through new algorithms, and more sophisticated and comprehensive strategies of prevention for online crimes.

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 in 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 1401 police officers from three countries (United Kingdom: N = 679, Netherlands: N = 97 and Italy: N = 602) who completed the questionnaire which was made available via Survey Monkey. The majority of the sample indicated that their rank was a police constable (N= 455; 33%) or detective constable (N= 193, 14%). Seventy-one per cent of the sample were male, with an overall mean age of 43 years and an average length of service (across roles) of 18.98 years.

Background

It is essential to understand the practice of policing cybercrime generally and specifically when dealing with online sexual risks to children and young people. Therefore, understanding the basics such as the frequency of contact or engagement with these crimes, but also more nebulous associations between working partnerships and experience is critical in recommending and suggesting new and innovative practice.

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

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