ISEC Illegal Use of the Internet Project — Stakeholder Consultation

Aims

This research is based on an ongoing European Commission funded investigation exploring two distinct areas of online childhood sexual exploitation (CSE): specifically policing and victimization. The work seeks to promote cooperation between law enforcement and industry in developing and disseminating good practice models in the area of online CSE. Through collaboration, this will ultimately assist practitioners and professionals in developing effective prevention techniques, assist with timely detection and deterrence, and add to the valid and current research base. The project has four primary and interdependent objectives: (1) construction of a unique cyber-psychological forensic risk analysis to isolate which users of a social network are most likely to become targets for online grooming: (2) linkage of project specific risk characteristics with other risk factors for grooming, (e.g., risk-taking, sexual orientation concerns); (3) creation of victim typologies of cyber-grooming to assist with identification of vulnerable individuals and groups; and (4) development of 'Best Practice' guidelines for industry and law enforcement in the identification and prevention of cyber-grooming. The analysis presented here focused on the qualitative portion of the first stream of research examining policing and industry collaborations in preventing and intervening in online CSE.

Key Findings

Issues emerging through discussions with police and industry stakeholders regarding online CSE:

- **Widespread problem**
  The extent of criminality associated with online CSE is massive and not uniquely associated with any one organization or group of professionals. The amount and extent of illegal material circulating on the internet is vast.

- **Prioritization of intervention and prevention**
  Due to the large scale problem faced, as well as the speed at which used technologies and platforms evolve, a multi-disciplinary, public health approach needs to be operationalized in which all agents involved standardize their approaches, primary aims and objectives.

- **Temporal incongruence**
  The developmental 'lifespans' of maturing children/adolescents, ICT devices and platforms, legislative development and ascension of policy and law are 'out of sync' with one another, and thus contribute to difficulties and complexities.

- **Uneven resource allocation**
  The reality of the problem includes unequal capabilities between industry and police due to resource allocation and availability.

- **Different aims and objectives**
  Police and industry professionals often differ in desired outcomes in terms of strategy, operations and prioritization when dealing with online CSE.

**Research Highlights for
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- **Training**
  Feelings of ill-preparedness were commonplace amongst law enforcement professionals, and many training packages were ad-hoc amendments on top of prior training.

- **Improving communication**
  Clarity and transparency between various partners combating online CSE is imperative to success and collaboration.

- **Working partnerships**
  When done well, working partnerships 'work'. They are the way forward and in considering some of the issues listed above, models and frameworks of good practice should be sought and standardized.

Policy Context

With the current media attention directed towards historical cases of childhood sexual abuse, as well as legislation at the EU and National level increasing in both coverage and complexity around both on- and off-line childhood sexual exploitation, it is vastly important to understand the operational mechanics of preventing and intervening in online CSE. This is fundamental in assisting with clarity and transparency in police operations, industry practices, and joint collaborative ventures.

Methodology

Eleven stakeholders were recruited across policing, industry, government, third sector and academia throughout England and Wales. A semi-structured interview probing elements of the investigative and legal parameters of online CSE was produced and piloted. Each interview lasted approximately 60 minutes and was transcribed. Organization of data and thematic analysis took place using Nvivo software. This analysis will be followed by a cross-cultural policing survey and a retrospective victimization study.

Background

As the offences being discussed are linked to online behaviour and identity, it is essential to understand the practice of online professionals when dealing with online sexual risks to children and young people. Therefore, understanding how industry works in collaboration with third sector organisations, government and policing agencies is central to improvements in education, awareness and prevention.

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